

THE LONG RED THREAD
HOW DEMOCRATIC DOMINANCE GAVE WAY TO REPUBLICAN ADVANTAGE
IN U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ELECTIONS, 1964-2018

by
Kyle Kondik

A thesis submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Baltimore, Maryland
September 2019

© 2019 Kyle Kondik
All Rights Reserved

Abstract

This history of U.S. House elections from 1964-2018 examines how Democratic dominance in the House prior to 1994 gave way to a Republican advantage in the years following the GOP takeover. Nationalization, partisan realignment, and the reapportionment and redistricting of House seats all contributed to a House where Republicans do not necessarily always dominate, but in which they have had an edge more often than not. This work explores each House election cycle in the time period covered and also surveys academic and journalistic literature to identify key trends and takeaways from more than a half-century of U.S. House election results in the one person, one vote era.

Advisor: Dorothea Wolfson

Readers: Douglas Harris, Matt Laslo

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
List of Tables.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Introduction: From Dark Blue to Light Red.....	1
Data, Definitions, and Methodology.....	9
Chapter One: The Partisan Consequences of the Reapportionment Revolution in the United States House of Representatives, 1964-1974.....	12
Chapter 2: The Roots of the Republican Revolution: 1976-1994.....	48
Chapter 3: The House from 1996 to 2018: A Persistent but not Unassailable Republican Edge.....	82
Conclusion: A Half-Century of Change in the House.....	141
Bibliography.....	149
Curriculum Vita.....	159

List of Tables

Table 1: Midterm House losses for presidential party, 1946-2018.....	26
Table 2: Net House change in states by districting status, 1964-1968.....	46

List of Figures

Figure 1: Regional share of House seats won by Democrats, 1964-1974.....	45
Figure 2: Republican share of House seats in the Greater South, 1964-2018.....	51
Figure 3: Regional share of House seats won by Democrats, 1976-1994.....	80
Figure 4: Partisan strength in the House, 1964-2018.....	82
Figure 5: Democratic share of the adjusted House popular vote compared to share of seats won, 1972-2018.....	85
Figure 6: Regional share of House seats won by Democrats, 1996-2018.....	139
Figure 7: Crossover House districts, 1964-2018.....	142
Figure 8: Regional share of House seats won by Democrats, 1964-2018.....	144
Figure 9: Regional distribution of House seats, 1960 census to 2010 census.....	145

Introduction: From Dark Blue to Light Red

Four days before the 1994 election, President Bill Clinton heard a prediction from a top advisor that he didn't believe. Dick Morris, a Republican operative whom Clinton's staff found so distasteful that the president hid his relationship with him, told Clinton that Democrats were going to lose their majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. "No way, no way," Clinton responded.¹

Few could blame Clinton for being incredulous about Morris' prediction. Democratic control of the House had been a given for decades. Save for brief, two-year majorities the Republicans won in 1946 and 1952, the Democrats had held the House uninterrupted since they took a majority in a series of special elections in 1931, which allowed them to capture the gavel when the House opened that year in December.

And yet Morris, of course, was right.

The Republican Revolution of 1994 represents a breaking point between more than a half-century of Democratic dominance in the House and a more recent period of what would probably be wrong to describe as Republican "dominance," but also probably would be wrong to describe as even partisan balance, either. Republicans appear to hold more advantages in the race for majority control of the U.S. House of Representatives than the Democrats do, but these advantages are not unassailable. Already, the Democrats have won House majorities three times since 1994, whereas the Republicans only won majorities in two elections between the New Deal and their 1994 breakthrough.

¹ Harris, *The Survivor*, 150.

It may seem off-base to argue that the nation is in the midst of a period of Republican advantage in the House at the same time that the Democrats currently hold a majority following their victories in 2018. Yet there are a number of factors that argue in favor of looking at the House as an institution where Republicans are generally better-positioned to capture majorities than Democrats are.

This is an important point to ponder because of the stakes for American governance. As this work will highlight, a long-term trend in American politics is the clearer separation of the two parties into more ideologically cohesive groups. As political scientist Sam Rosenfeld argued in his recent history of the origins of polarization, “The two major American political parties are now sorted quite clearly along ideological lines. The most liberal Republican member of Congress has amassed a voting record that is consistently to the right of the most conservative Democrat.”²

With more ideologically consistent parties—almost all the liberals in the Democratic Party, and almost all of the conservatives in the Republican Party—the opportunities for big-picture legislative compromises seem reduced from the past. This was obvious from two of the biggest legislative fights in Congress over the past decade: The struggle to pass the Affordable Care Act in 2009-2010, led by Democrats, and the struggle to do away with that same legislation, led by Republicans, in 2017. Ultimately, Republicans decided to play no role in the passage of the Affordable Care Act. Not only was it legislation that they did not believe in, but they also decided they did not want to provide bipartisan cover for majority Democrats. They were rewarded for their efforts:

² Rosenfeld, *Polarizers*, 3.

The ACA became law, but blowback to it helped them win control of the House back in 2010. When Republicans tried to unwind the ACA in 2017, Democrats—then in the minority themselves—not only disagreed with the Republicans’ health care plans, but they also were disincentivized to provide bipartisan cover to the majority Republicans. The Republicans pushed an ACA repeal through the House at great effort, but those efforts died in the Senate. Democrats ran heavily on health care in 2018 and re-took the majority. Political scientist Frances Lee, in her history of competition for majorities in the House and Senate, described how both parties have come to believe, with great justification, that they can better win majorities not by working with the majority party, but by fighting it tooth and nail.³ That sort of behavior also makes more sense when there’s not much ideological overlap between the two parties, which is true now but wasn’t necessarily true a few decades ago. “These developments,” Rosenfeld wrote, “have helped to give contemporary politics the distinctive character of high-stakes warfare.”⁴ This is all a long way of saying that it may be that the only way either party can truly govern is when they have unified control of Washington.

The majority party in the House has always been important, but it may be more important in a time of hard partisanship, ideological cohesion, and little bipartisan cooperation. So if in fact the Republicans have an advantage in the race for the House—an advantage that doesn’t guarantee them control of the House at all times, but at more times than the Democrats—that has profound and important consequences for governing.

³ Lee, *Insecure Majorities*.

⁴ Rosenfeld, *Polarizers*, 3.

What follows is an exploration of how the House transitioned from a period of Democratic dominance to one of Republican advantage. This work is broken into three chapters, which together explore all 28 House elections held from 1964 through 2018: more than half a century of electoral history in the United States. Clearly, this history could not highlight every single election: With 435 seats at stake every two years, this time period features 12,180 individual elections, which would be impossible (and tedious) to cover in a single work. Instead, this volume looks for larger trends and uses individual and interesting results from each election to highlight them.

The starting point for this work, 1964, is not selected randomly. It was the first election after a series of monumental Supreme Court decisions that injected the principle of “one person, one vote” into the drawing of congressional and state legislative districts. Prior to these decisions, U.S. House districts did not have to have equal populations within states. But over the course of the mid-to-late 1960s, states changed their district maps to comply with these rulings. So 1964 seemed like a logical place to start as a study of modern U.S. House elections.

The first chapter covers the elections held from 1964-1974 and traces the changing district lines forced by the Supreme Court’s reapportionment decisions. This was a period of huge Democratic majorities, and the changing lines did not seem to impact that dominance all that much. However, one begins to see some stirrings of modern trends in this period, as the previously moribund Republican Party in the conservative but then-very Democratic South began to assert itself more fully.

The second chapter brings the narrative up to 1994, when the Republicans finally broke through and won the House majority. Going election by election, the narrative

traces how Republicans, despite remaining in the minority throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, did make subtle gains and, perhaps more importantly, avoided major losses despite holding the White House for the entire 1980s. As is explored much more deeply in the text, midterm elections are typically the engines of change in the House, and the president's party often suffers major losses in such elections. Democrats failed to make major gains in such elections under Republican presidents during this era, and ended up losing major ground themselves when they were exposed to a midterm election under a Democratic president in 1994. While Chapter One focuses on the fallout from the Supreme Court's reapportionment decisions, Chapter Two assesses how redistricting based on race, which was pushed by the President George H.W. Bush-era Justice Department, had an impact on partisan control of the House.

Chapter Three brings the story up to the present and describes the elections from 1996 to 2018. This was a period of typical but not absolute Republican control, which was bolstered by stronger Republican control of the levers of redistricting power in many states, particularly during the post-2010 census round of redistricting. This chapter looks most deeply at such so-called "gerrymandering"—the drawing of district lines for partisan benefit—although discussions of districting choices, and the political power that drives them, are prominent throughout this study.

Overall, there are three major trends over the course of the history described throughout that helped transition the House from a body dominated by Democrats to one where Republicans enjoy a persistent but not overwhelming electoral advantage. Those are nationalization, realignment, and reapportionment, all of which are inextricably linked with one another.

1. Nationalization: Over the course of the time period studied, House results became increasingly correlated with presidential results. At the start of the study, in the 1960s and 1970s, it was common for presidential elections to feature a tremendous amount of down-ballot ticket-splitting. For instance, more than a quarter of House districts, even in closely-contested presidential elections, would vote for different parties for president and for House during this period. More recently, there has been far less ticket-splitting and more nationalization of results, which probably helps Republicans and hurts Democrats because of the Republicans' growing control of the redistricting process in the past couple of decades paired with, arguably, disparities in national population distribution that disadvantage Democrats. Additionally, some of the factors that helped sustain Democratic majorities—such as the ideological diversity of members and the advantage of incumbency—have eroded in recent years as elections have moved from being more localized to more nationalized.
2. Realignment: Over the last six decades, the American electorate has realigned in its preferences. The South, historically the nation's most ideologically conservative region, nonetheless helped sustain Democratic control of the House even as the national Democratic Party was moving left. Over time, conservatives in the South started voting up and down the ballot for members of the more conservative national party, the Republicans. Meanwhile, ideologically less conservative regions, like the West Coast and Northeast, have moved toward the Democrats, with the more moderate Midwest

oscillating between the two parties. These overall realigning trends have generally benefited the Republicans more than the Democrats.

3. Reapportionment: As noted above, Republicans have generally had more success dealing with reapportionment—a term that covers not just the reallocation of House seats after each census based on population, but also the process of drawing new districts—over the past few decades. The shifting of seats based on population changes from the generally slower-growing Northeast and Midwest to the generally faster-growing South and West helped Republicans at a crucial time, specifically in advance of the 2002 midterm, to maintain their House majority.

As part of this entire project, much of the key literature concerning electoral nationalization, electoral patterns, reapportionment, redistricting, and other factors is covered. There are not necessarily “schools of thought” in studying House elections, although there are disagreements about how decisive factors such as redistricting are in electoral outcomes. This work takes something of a middle view on the redistricting question: On one hand, there is voluminous evidence cited throughout that partisan redistricting impacts outcomes and is important; on the other hand, it does not go so far to say that partisan redistricting can guarantee outcomes or that redistricting can necessarily lock one party into, and one party out of, majority control of the House.

If such a lock was possible, it might be that this work would be finalized during a Republican majority in the House that persisted despite a strong national preference for Democratic House control in 2018. But the Democrats did in fact win the House majority that year. That does not necessarily mean that the Democrats do not have certain

handicaps in the biennial battle for the House, but those handicaps are not impossible to overcome.

Data, Definitions, and Methodology

This work is heavily reliant on the *Almanac of American Politics*, which has been published continuously every two years starting in 1971. It is the source of all election results and presidential election results by congressional district for Chapters Two and Three and for parts of Chapter One. Various editions of the *Almanac* are also cited heavily throughout. For Chapter One, which covers some elections contested before the first publication of the *Almanac*, district election results are from the 1964-1968 editions of *America Votes*. District-level presidential results are supplemented by an unpublished compilation by House expert Gary Jacobson. National House popular vote totals and “crossover” House district tallies—districts that vote for different parties for president and for House in a given year—are from the Brookings Institution’s Vital Statistics on Congress (<https://www.brookings.edu/multi-chapter-report/vital-statistics-on-congress/>) or were compiled by the author.

Regional definitions are as follows:

Greater South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Interior West: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.

Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Northeast: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

West Coast: California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.

These definitions are the same as those established by political scientist David Hopkins in his book, *Red Fighting Blue*, which explores the nation's political divides by geography. While noting that “[t]here are no consensus definitions of geographic regions in the United States,”⁵ Hopkins’ framework proposes five distinct areas. One key note about Hopkins’ regions is that his definition adds Kentucky, Oklahoma, and West Virginia to the 11 states of the old Confederacy to create a Greater South region. While other analysts may restrict the South to the traditional definition—just the 11 previously Confederate states—including these three states as part of the Greater South is appropriate when assessing House results given that all three states had a strong Democratic House tradition in the decades preceding the Reapportionment Revolution, somewhat similar to the more traditionally recognized southern states, and because these states “can be viewed as culturally and politically southern,” Hopkins argued.⁶ In more recent times, all three states have also turned toward the Republicans and become reliably Republican in presidential elections and in their House delegations, just like much of the rest of the South. In any event, when these five regional terms are used throughout, they adhere to the definitions laid out above except when otherwise noted.

Calculations in the text are by the author unless otherwise cited. This includes the makeup of the House after each November election. Independents are counted as members of the party with whom they caucused. So, as an example, then-Rep. Bernie Sanders (I, VT-AL) is counted as a Democrat in the elections in which he was elected

⁵ Hopkins, *Red Fighting Blue*, 26.

⁶ Hopkins, *Red Fighting Blue*, 27.

(1990-2004) for the purposes of the overall tallies reported throughout this project.

Consequently, when Sanders left the House and was elected to the Senate in 2006, he was replaced by an actual Democrat, Rep. Peter Welch (D, VT-AL). This change is not reflected as a Democratic pickup in these calculations; instead it is treated as retained Democratic control of the seat.

Additionally, the net change in seats from one election to the next is measured by comparing the House elected in one general election with that elected in the next election. For instance, it was commonly reported that the Democrats picked up 40 net seats in the 2018 election. That was true because the Democrats technically held 195 seats immediately going into that election, and they won 235, a net gain of 40. However, Democrats only won 194 seats in the 2016 election. They won their 195th seat in a March 2018 special election. But for the purposes of consistency across years, this project just reflects general election results. So because Democrats won 41 more House seats in 2018 than they won in 2016, their net gain here is reported as 41, not 40.

Chapter One: The Partisan Consequences of the Reapportionment Revolution in the United States House of Representatives, 1964-1974

In early 2018, Democrats won a major victory over Republicans in a Pennsylvania congressional redistricting case.⁷ The state's Supreme Court, an elected body where Democrats held a five-to-two majority, threw out the state's Republican-drawn U.S. House of Representatives district map, which had been drawn following the 2010 census. The court then imposed its own map after the state's Democratic governor and Republican legislature could not come to terms on a compromise map. Republican state legislators and the Republican governor had designed the previous map to benefit their party, and it contributed to the 13-5 majority Republicans would win in the state's House of Representatives delegation in 2012, 2014, and 2016. The new map made it easier for Democrats to net extra seats in the state in the 2018 election (this is explored in more depth in Chapter Three).

As a result of its decision, the state Supreme Court drew 18 new districts, all of which had near-identical populations: most had 705,688 residents, while a few had 705,687. That the districts had to be equal in population was a given for the court,⁸ and there was recent precedent from Pennsylvania illustrating the necessity of creating districts with equal populations: In 2002, a federal court struck down a Republican-drawn congressional map because of a disparity of 19 people between the least and most populous districts.⁹

⁷ *League of Women Voters, et al. v. the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, et al.*, 159 MM (2017).

⁸ *Wesberry v. Sanders*, 376 U.S. 1 (1964). The Supreme Court mandated that as “nearly as is practicable, one man's vote in a congressional election is to be worth as much as another's” in its landmark 1964 decision.

⁹ Richard Engstrom, “Missing the Target,” 315-317.

It may seem obvious that U.S. House districts should have equal populations, but for most of American history, that was not really a requirement. As a result, House districts within states would often vary wildly in population size, creating “glaring disparities in voting power.”¹⁰ This problem became more acute in the 20th century as the nation’s population grew and became more urban. By the 1920 census, a majority of the population lived in urban as opposed to rural areas. District lines in many states did not change with population changes, and the average population deviation between districts within states rose in the 20th century, Erik Engstrom found in his study of gerrymandering.¹¹

Political scientist Andrew Hacker, writing in the midst of the legal battles that would lead to population equality in districts, found that of “the 42 states with more than one congressional district after the 1960 Census, exactly half contain constituencies where the vote of a citizen in the smallest congressional district is worth at least twice that of the citizen in the largest district.”¹² For example, after the 1960 census Michigan had one congressional district with 802,994 residents while another had 177,431. It, along with Texas, was the most malapportioned state, according to Hacker.¹³

The U.S. Supreme Court, after long staying out of what conservative Justice Felix Frankfurter called the “political thicket”¹⁴ of congressional redistricting and reapportionment, decided in *Baker v. Carr* (1962) that it could intervene in such cases. Two years later, the Supreme Court decided in *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964) that

¹⁰ Hacker, *Congressional Districting*, 2.

¹¹ Erik Engstrom, *Partisan Gerrymandering*, 152-154.

¹² Hacker, *Congressional Districting*, 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Colegrove v. Green*, 328 U.S. 549 (1946).

congressional districts needed to have equal populations. The Wesberry decision forced states to redraw their districts to address malapportionment. Change happened quickly: Every state adopted new congressional districts to comply with the ruling by 1967, just a few years after the landmark Wesberry ruling.¹⁵

While the court did away with malapportionment, it did not address partisan redistricting, often called “gerrymandering.” The Supreme Court has never imposed practical standards on the practice. In a 2004 decision dealing with the Pennsylvania redistricting mentioned above, *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, the court upheld the districts (redrawn for equal population) because a five-to-four majority, led by swing Justice Anthony Kennedy, determined there was no way for the court to determine what was or was not an impermissible partisan gerrymander.¹⁶ In 2019’s *Rucho v. Common Cause*, Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for a five-to-four majority once again on this issue, determined that “Partisan gerrymandering claims present political questions beyond the reach of the federal courts.”¹⁷ So while the court once decided to enter the political thicket of population equality, it has resisted entering the thicket of partisan redistricting.

At the dawn of the post-Reapportionment Revolution era, congressional line-drawers found themselves constrained by district population size, but little else. What follows is an examination of the immediate partisan consequences of the Reapportionment Revolution, from the implementation of the new maps through the pivotal 1974 midterm election, where Democrats made significant gains in the House in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal and President Richard Nixon’s resignation. The

¹⁵ Ansolabahere and Snyder, *End of Inequality*, 95.

¹⁶ Backstrom, Krislov, and Robins, “Desperately Seeking Standards,” 409-410.

¹⁷ *Rucho v. Common Cause*, 138 U.S. 2679 (2018).

era studied is bookended by two elections, 1964 and 1974, which featured some of the strongest electoral performances in the history of the Democratic Party. In 1964, Democrats captured 294 House seats, and in 1974, 291.

So while there was not a direct, short-term impact on the Democrats' dominance in the House, the individual seats that made up those big Democratic majorities did change on a state-by-state level, and those changing patterns in the post-Wesberry world provided some clues about the future shape of the House.

Literature review: Benefits for Democrats in the North

The end of malapportionment may have benefited Democrats, at least outside the party's then-preserve in the South. A persistent pro-Republican bias in non-southern House results disappeared in the mid-to-late 1960s and "can be explained largely by the changing composition of northern districting plans," political scientists Gary Cox and Jonathan Katz found.¹⁸ The Democrats won better maps in the North in part because they found themselves in a strong partisan position heading into redistricting and because a majority of the non-southern House maps at the state level were either drawn by Republicans or were modifications of previous Republican-drawn districts.¹⁹ Overall, political scientist Ward Elliott argued that the "Reapportionment Revolution took place at a particularly bad time for the Republicans; namely, after the elections of 1964,"²⁰ when Republicans had lost hundreds of state legislative seats nationally thanks to President

¹⁸ Cox and Katz, "Reapportionment Revolution and Bias in U.S. Congressional Elections," 812.

¹⁹ Cox and Katz, *Elbridge Gerry's Salamander*, 24.

²⁰ Elliott, "Prometheus, Proteus, Pandora, and Procrustes Unbound," 489.

Lyndon B. Johnson's (D) strong national victory, leaving Republicans with a weak hand to play as most states redrew their maps to comply with Wesberry following that election.

The South looms large as a region where the Democrats maintained a strong hold even after reapportionment, although this era did see southern Republicanism grow in strength. After World War II, there were only two Republicans in the entire 105-member House delegation covering the 11 states of the Civil War-era Confederacy.²¹ "Beginning in the 1950s, however, the GOP started to register gains, which increased markedly in the 1960s and then leveled off in the 1980s," political scientist Seth McKee found in his study of the rise of the GOP in the southern U.S. House delegation.²² Throughout the postwar era, party identification among southern whites gradually became more Republican and less Democratic, but Republican identification only overtook Democratic ID in the 1990s, around the time of the decisive 1994 election in which Republicans made major gains in the South, realizing their potential in this historically conservative region.²³ Redistricting was certainly a critical force in the lead up to 1994, but how districts were historically drawn was not thought to impact that relationship in the 1960s, when in the South "Democratic hegemony was taken for granted,"²⁴ McKee noted, as evidenced by the Democrats' lopsided control of the region's House delegation at the time.

A key factor for contemporary observers to remember is that the 1960s and 1970s featured a considerable amount of ticket-splitting, with Republicans building an

²¹ McKee, *Republican Ascendancy in Southern U.S. House Elections*, 17.

²² Ibid.

²³ McKee, *Republican Ascendancy in Southern U.S. House Elections*, 53.

²⁴ McKee, *Republican Ascendancy in Southern U.S. House Elections*, 72.

advantage in presidential contests but Democrats retaining a strong hold over the U.S. House. For instance, in both the 1968 and 1976 presidential elections (two races decided by very narrow margins nationally), roughly 30% of House districts in both elections voted for different parties for president and for the House. In 2012 and 2016, less than 10% of all districts featured such a split. Who were the voters splitting their tickets? In general, there is no consensus on why ticket-splitting occurred so regularly in that earlier time period. “[I]n some accounts, they were mostly middle-class professionals alienated by the [Democrats’] tolerance of high taxes and crime rates, while other descriptions portrayed them as largely consisting of white Catholics and blue-collar southerners dissatisfied with Democratic leaders’ cultural permissiveness and dovish approach to foreign policy,” political scientist David Hopkins wrote.²⁵

Wesberry pushed states to redraw their congressional districts, forcing both new maps to equalize populations among districts and then regular redistricting action in response to the population changes indicated by the decennial census. After Wesberry, all states have fallen into a routine where they draw new maps to account for population changes every 10 years, although on occasion states or courts will redraw districts in the middle of a decade, such as the example noted above with the state Supreme Court drawing new Pennsylvania maps in 2018 or Republican lawmakers in Texas drawing a new map after their party won control of the state legislature in 2002.

Frequent redistricting was a prominent feature of late 19th century politics, according to political scientist Erik Engstrom: “In every year from 1862 and 1896, with

²⁵ Hopkins, *Red Fighting Blue*, 102.

one exception, at least one state redrew its congressional district boundaries. Ohio, for example, redrew its congressional district boundaries six times between 1878 and 1890.”²⁶ The consequences of these remaps could be profound, such as in 1888, when Pennsylvania Republicans “engineered a last-minute redistricting that helped ensure a narrow Republican majority in the House.”²⁷ Nothing forbids states, even now, from engaging in such frequent redistricting. Redistricting became less common in the 20th century, and unchanging districts became “silent gerrymanders”²⁸ that preserved party strength in many states through malapportionment. Ohio, for instance, did not change its maps at all from 1914 to 1952,²⁹ opting for stability over the wild gyrations it experienced in the late 1800s.

At this point, a slight historical detour is warranted. The term “gerrymandering” arose from what may be the most famous political cartoon in American history, describing a legislative district shaped like a salamander. In 1812, the Democratic-Republican-controlled Massachusetts state legislature tried to maximize its number of seats in a new districting plan and minimize those held by the minority Federalists. Elbridge Gerry (pronounced with a hard g, like Gary), the Democratic-Republican governor, “disliked the plan but signed the remap into law anyway—a veto, he thought, would be improper.”³⁰ A Federalist newspaper cartoonist seized on one of the districts, a long, thin district that snaked from southwest to northeast, making an inverse L, and dubbed it the “gerrymander,” complete with wings, claws, and a snarling lizard’s head.

²⁶ Erik Engstrom, *Partisan Gerrymandering*, 8.

²⁷ Erik Engstrom, *Partisan Gerrymandering*, 9.

²⁸ Erik Engstrom, *Partisan Gerrymandering*, 177.

²⁹ Erik Engstrom, *Partisan Gerrymandering*, 172.

³⁰ Monmonier, *Bushmanders and Bullwinkles*, 1.

Thus emerged the gerrymander (pronounced in modern times with a soft g, like Jerry). Interestingly, the famous salamander gerrymander district proved ineffective: “in the next year’s elections, the Federalists recaptured the district even though it was full of voters who, it seemed, would not support them.”³¹ But this was not even the first gerrymander. In an early study of gerrymanders, Elmer Griffith found examples in the pre-colonial period.³² Nor was it the first gerrymander that failed: James Madison, the father of the Constitution and a future president, “had to overcome a district gerrymandered against him in his first run for Congress” in a contest against future president James Monroe, which Madison nonetheless won anyway.³³ (Political scientist Thomas Rogers Hunter disputes the idea that Madison’s district was gerrymandered, arguing that the district was compactly drawn and only seemed gerrymandered because Madison lived in an anti-Federalist area.)³⁴ From the very beginnings of the idea of the gerrymander, one can begin to sense a theme: Even if districts are nefariously drawn to benefit one party or candidate over the other, they do not always work out the way they are designed, whether in the district’s initial election or in subsequent contests.

Back to the 1960s. In Wesberry’s wake, though, some observers felt that the court would prompt more gerrymandering. That’s not to say gerrymandering did not happen in the decades before Wesberry. For instance, political scientist David Mayhew found that “ingenious cartographic efforts” in California and New York prior to the 1952 election may have been decisive in helping Republicans win a national House majority that year,³⁵

³¹ Rush, *Does Redistricting Make a Difference?* 2.

³² Griffith, *Rise and Development of the Gerrymander*, 26-29.

³³ Mann, “Redistricting Reform,” 111.

³⁴ Hunter, “First Gerrymander?” 781.

³⁵ Mayhew, “Congressional Representation,” 277.

which was one of only two times Republicans won the House from 1932 through 1992 (1946 was the other). But Wesberry may have opened the door to such gerrymandering becoming more common, according to political scientists Nathaniel Persily, Thad Kousser, and Patrick Egan: “Although it is true that before 1962, parties in control of legislatures could target their opponents for elimination, the practice became routinized once the Court mandated decennial redistricting.”³⁶ Political scientist Robert J. Sickels argued in the aftermath of the reapportionment decisions that “court-ordered redistricting was viewed as an invitation to compensate for the loss of one tool of gerrymandering by the sharpening of others.”³⁷ In other words, Sickels suggested that the Reapportionment Revolution served as a prompt for states to gerrymander.

Overall, though, political scientists tended to downplay the importance of gerrymandering in the immediate aftermath of the Reapportionment Revolution. Writing in 1972, political scientist Robert Erikson observed that “partisan control of the districting scheme is not as important a determinant of partisan control of the state's congressional districts as might be thought.”³⁸ With that, let’s move on to an analysis of the elections immediately following the Reapportionment Revolution.

The House at the dawn of the Reapportionment Revolution

Nine months after the Supreme Court issued the Wesberry ruling, President Lyndon Johnson (D) won the largest share of the national popular vote (61.1%) of any presidential candidate of either party in the history of the modern two-party era (since

³⁶ Persily, Kousser, and Egan, “Complicated Impact of One Person, One Vote,” 1326.

³⁷ Sickels, “Dragons, Bacon Strips and Dumbbells,” 1308.

³⁸ Erikson, “Malapportionment, Gerrymandering, and Party Fortunes,” 1243.

1856). Johnson's electoral coattails helped Democrats add 37 net seats to their already-large House majority, pushing the Democratic caucus to 294 members, a height the party had not reached since Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal (and a majority the size of which has not been matched by either party since). Even though the Supreme Court handed down the Wesberry verdict in advance of the 1964 election, only five states immediately drew new maps in time for that election, meaning that the lion's share of the districts in place for 1964 were unaffected by the ruling.³⁹ Some of the districts that remained unchanged had been drawn in 1962 before Wesberry, but others had not been changed in decades.

Democrats captured 47 previously Republican seats in 1964 spread over 19 states. Almost a quarter of those gains (11) came in just two states, New Jersey (four) and New York (seven), and about a third (17) came from the Midwest, led by a five-seat gain in Iowa and four seats apiece in Michigan and Ohio. Of these states featuring large Democratic gains, only Michigan drew new districts in advance of the 1964 election. Michigan also was the most malapportioned state in the country prior to the Wesberry ruling, and it merits a closer look.

Republicans controlled redistricting in Michigan both before and after Wesberry. But when a federal court invalidated the state's districts as noncompliant with Wesberry in March 1964, Republicans had little time to draw a new map before the November elections, and the court told the state that if it did not draw a new map, the state would elect all of its members in statewide at-large elections, something Republicans did not

³⁹ Cox and Katz, "Reapportionment Revolution and Bias in U.S. Congressional Elections," 812.

want. That, plus a legislative time limit that Republicans lacked a two-thirds legislative majority to bypass, “meant that concessions had to be made to the Democrats” in the new map.⁴⁰

Michigan’s malapportionment did not necessarily come from a dramatic underrepresentation of big urban areas. Wayne County, home of Detroit, had six congressional districts both before and after the end of malapportionment, although there was a wide disparity among the populations of the six Wayne County districts that redistricting corrected. In any event, Wayne County sent six Democrats to the House both before and after Wesberry. Outside of Wayne County, the largest district by population was MI-18, which before redistricting covered all of Oakland County, part of Greater Detroit. It had about 690,000 residents. The smallest district by population, with about 177,000 residents, was MI-12, which covered the western half of the sparsely-populated Upper Peninsula. Redistricting corrected these population imbalances by splitting Oakland County into two districts while combining into one the two districts that previously covered the Upper Peninsula and the state’s northern tip.

Redistricting also gave Macomb County, another part of Greater Detroit, its own district. Growing suburban representation would be a prominent feature of many moves to correct malapportionment, because these areas often were dramatically underrepresented in the House and because these areas accounted for a large share of population growth in the 1960s.⁴¹ Additionally, a district that covered Flint and Lansing, the state capital, was split in two separate districts centered on each city. The state also

⁴⁰ Cox and Katz, “Reapportionment Revolution and Bias in U.S. Congressional Elections,” 819.

⁴¹ Cummings, “Reapportionment in the 1970s: Its Effects on Congress,” 210-211, 221

eliminated a statewide at-large district it had created when the state received an extra seat following the 1960 census. Democrats performed well on the new map in the short term, netting four seats and flipping the state delegation from 11-8 Republican to 12-7 Democratic.

Republicans made gains of their own, though. The 1964 presidential election represented a sea change in American presidential elections as Republican nominee Barry Goldwater, running as an opponent of federal civil rights legislation, became the first Republican to ever carry all five states of the Deep South (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina). Goldwater won only one other state, his home state of Arizona. Unlike in the nation's other four regions, where Democrats netted House seats overall, Republicans netted House seats in the Greater South, fueled by Alabama, a state that also drew new House districts in 1964.

In 1962 statewide at-large elections, Alabama elected eight Democrats and no Republicans. It had lost a seat after the 1960 census and held statewide House elections instead of drawing new districts. The state did redistrict in 1964, although the districts it drew in some instances did not have the population equity required by Wesberry, thus forcing another redraw in 1966 that only impacted three districts.⁴² After the 1964 redistricting, Republicans won five of eight House seats in Alabama despite fielding candidates in only six of the eight districts, so only one opposed Democrat actually won. Republican challengers won one open seat and defeated four Democratic incumbents, powered by Goldwater's nearly 70% statewide majority. This represented a lasting shift

⁴² Martis, *Historical Atlas of United States Congressional Districts*, 218.

in Alabama. While Democrats would regain some of their lost ground in subsequent elections, Alabama did not have a single Republican House member prior to 1964. After 1964, it has never elected fewer than two in any election.

Georgia elected its first Republican House member since Reconstruction when Bo Callaway (R) won an open seat in GA-3, a rural district containing the city of Columbus in west central Georgia. Goldwater's huge victory almost surely is the biggest reason Callaway won: While the district changed somewhat in redistricting—James P. Wesberry, Jr., the namesake of the landmark Supreme Court case, was a Georgia resident and the case immediately forced redistricting in that state—Goldwater easily carried every county in both the old and new versions of the district. Goldwater won the new GA-3 with 63% of the two-party vote; the old district had given just 33% of the two-party vote to Richard Nixon (R) four years earlier, a 30-point Republican swing that mirrored Georgia's state-level swing from Nixon to Goldwater.

Another southern gain came in Mississippi, where Prentiss Walker (R) defeated 20-year incumbent W. Arthur Winstead (D), “the only incumbent congressman unfortunate enough to have a Republican challenger that year.”⁴³ Had Republicans put up candidates in the other four districts, they very likely would have picked up more seats in Mississippi that year. A lack of candidates almost certainly cost Republicans elsewhere in the South: In the five Goldwater-won states, Republicans only ran candidates in 15 of 37 districts. Of those 15, seven won, an impressive winning percentage in a region where Republicans hardly registered prior to Goldwater.

⁴³ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1972*, 422

The House elected in 1964 was something of a rarity for this era in that Democrats actually won a majority of non-southern House seats. That would not be the case two years later, even as Democrats lost additional ground in Dixie.

1966: Redistricting begins in earnest as Republicans strike back

Midterm elections often break against the president's party, as political scientist Andrew Busch explains in his history of such elections: "[T]he midterm election pattern virtually guarantees that the president's party will be hurt at regular intervals. The extent of that damage may vary considerably, but the fact of it rarely does."⁴⁴ There have been 40 midterm elections since the Civil War, and the president's party has lost ground in the House in 37 of those elections. The average loss is about 33 seats. Table 1 shows the net change in the House in midterm years from the end of World War II through 2018. As the table confirms, the president's party almost always loses ground. Some elections are worse than others for the presidential party—for instance, Democrats lost only five net seats in John F. Kennedy's lone midterm in 1962, the election immediately before the beginning of this study's timeframe—but 1966 held to the more traditional pattern, as Democrats lost 47 seats. Part of this was because the public was beginning to turn against Johnson thanks to exhaustion from the liberal policies of Johnson's Great Society and his handling of the war in Vietnam,⁴⁵ and part of it too was simply that Democrats did not have anywhere to go but down from their huge House majority.

⁴⁴ Busch, *Horses in Midstream*, 9.

⁴⁵ Busch, *Horses in Midstream*, 100-101.

Table 1: Midterm House losses for presidential party, 1946-2018

Year	Party holding presidency	President's party gain/loss of seats in House
1946	D	-55
1950	D	-29
1954	R	-18
1958	R	-47
1962	D	-5
1966	D	-47
1970	R	-12
1974	R	-48
1978	D	-15
1982	R	-26
1986	R	-5
1990	R	-8
1994	D	-54
1998	D	4
2002	R	7
2006	R	-30
2010	D	-64
2014	D	-13
2018	R	-41

Source: Compiled by author.

Roughly half of the Republican gain came simply from retaking districts that had voted Democratic in 1964. Some of these districts probably did not have much business electing Democrats anyway, but they did in 1964 during a huge Democratic wave. For instance, Democrats could not hold districts in traditionally Republican states like Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming in 1966 that they had captured somewhat surprisingly two years earlier. Iowa, which had given Democrats five net seats in 1964,

turned four of them back red in 1966. Redistricting had nothing to do with these changes, because none of these states drew new maps in response to Wesberry prior to the 1966 elections.

But redistricting may have made a difference elsewhere. Republicans gained 10 seats total from just two states in 1966, the aforementioned Michigan and its southern neighbor, Ohio. Both states had drawn new districts in this era—Michigan before 1964 and Ohio before 1966—and these changes likely affected their partisan balance.

Even though Democrats had seemingly benefited from the Michigan remap, the new map was not necessarily Democratic-leaning even though it produced a 12-7 Democratic delegation in 1964. Based on the two-party presidential vote, the state's median House seat was about two points to the right of the state—Johnson had won 67% statewide, but only 65% in the median seat—and several of the Democratic gains were by small vote shares in 1964. With the changing political tides in 1966, and the Republicans holding a generic advantage, Republicans were able to win back what they had lost in 1966 in Michigan, and then some.

Ohio, too, saw Republicans claw back their 1964 losses. Democrats netted four seats in 1964 by less than five points apiece, and all four of those new Democratic incumbents lost in 1966's less favorable environment. The state also redistricted in between the two elections, and Republicans controlled the process. Three of the four new Democratic incumbents saw their districts substantially redrawn. Republicans also converted a statewide at-large seat into a favorable, Republican-leaning seat in western Franklin County (Columbus). Franklin County needed a second seat to account for its growing population anyway—another example of an underrepresented suburban area—

and back in the 1960s the county was very Republican (it would become very Democratic by the 2010s). The combination of 1966's Republican-leaning political conditions coupled with a GOP-drawn map led to disastrous consequences for Democrats in Ohio.

Republicanism in the South endured breakthroughs and setbacks in 1966. On one hand, Democrats recaptured two of the five seats they lost in Alabama two years prior, and they also won back their lost seat in Mississippi after Walker unsuccessfully ran for U.S. Senate. On the other hand, Arkansas elected its first modern Republican in 1966, John Paul Hammerschmidt (R), after it redrew its districts. Hammerschmidt defeated a 20-year incumbent in James Trimble (D, AR-3). It's hard to say much conclusive about the possible effect redistricting may have had on Hammerschmidt's win, but AR-3 was the most sparsely-populated district in the state prior to redistricting, and thus it had to take on more territory. The district, which covered much of western Arkansas and included much of the then-Democratic state's ancestral Republican territory, picked up additional counties to its south, some of which had voted for Nixon in 1960 and thus probably made the district marginally more Republican. Redistricting in Florida created a new district in South Florida, giving Republican-leaning Broward County (Fort Lauderdale) its own congressional district, which turned out to be an easy Republican pickup. This was not a historic breakthrough for Republicans in this southern state, though—they already held two seats in the state prior to 1966.

While history-making Republican Callaway gave up his seat in Georgia to run unsuccessfully for governor, helping Democrats win it back, Republicans captured both of the seats in the Atlanta area, the underrepresentation of which spawned the Wesberry lawsuit. Wesberry himself was a resident of the old Atlanta-based GA-5, which prior to

the landmark court decision bearing his name had nearly three times the population of Georgia's least-populated district. Georgia's new districts did not lead to Republican gains in 1964—remember, the one seat the Republicans gained probably did not have much to do with redistricting—but the new plan did create an extra seat in the Atlanta area.

Other Republican gains south of the Mason-Dixon line came in Maryland, where redistricting turned a statewide at-large seat into a new seat centered on Montgomery County, which contains some of the Washington, D.C. suburbs, and Tennessee, where new districts gave Memphis an additional representative. Republicans won four of nine seats in Tennessee that year, adding a Memphis seat to three the party already held in eastern Tennessee, which has been Republican for generations and opposed secession in the Civil War era.

In Virginia, the Old Dominion's new House map had to adjust for growing population in Northern Virginia, also in the D.C. suburbs. The new plan modified VA-8, home to powerful House Rules Committee Chairman Howard Smith, a conservative Democrat who would lose a primary to a liberal challenger. A Republican then won the seat in the fall. In Texas, a new redistricting plan boosted the representation of previously underrepresented big cities like Dallas and Houston. Future President George H.W. Bush (R) won a new Houston-area seat in 1966, part of two Republican victories in Texas that broke up the 23-0 House monopoly Democrats had won in Texas in 1964. Republicans also added a seat in South Carolina in advance of the 1966 election not because of redistricting or by beating a Democrat, but rather because segregationist Albert Watson switched parties following the 1964 election. Watson followed the lead of Sen. Strom

Thurmond, who had switched from Democrat to Republican before the 1964 election.

Watson resigned from Congress after the Democratic caucus stripped him of his seniority for backing Goldwater, and he ran in and won a special election for his old seat.⁴⁶

Watson was the first of 15 conservative Democratic House members who would abandon the party from 1965 to the end of the century, according to a count from political scientists Timothy P. Nokken and Keith T. Poole's study of congressional party-switchers.⁴⁷ Most of those came after Ronald Reagan's election as president in 1980,

As shown through some of these examples from 1966, the growing voting power of suburban areas forced by Wesberry likely benefited Republicans in the South in part because early southern Republicanism first emerged in big metropolitan areas over the first half of the 20th century. "Retirees from the Midwest and Northeast had begun to settle in Florida before the Depression, and the rise of Southern industry in the postwar South brought in Northern managers. They brought their Republican voting habits with them," wrote political analyst Sean Trende.⁴⁸ Bush himself is a good example of this trend—he was born in Massachusetts and his father was a senator from Connecticut.

Republicans would lose some of these newfound southern urban and suburban seats in subsequent elections, when the national pendulum swung to the Democrats, but in a region known for Democratic dominance, Republican victories—once unthinkable—

⁴⁶ "Albert Watson, 72, Lawmaker; Opposed Integration of Schools," *New York Times*, Sept. 27, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/09/27/obituaries/albert-watson-72-lawmaker-opposed-integration-of-schools.html>.

⁴⁷ Nokken and Poole, "Congressional Party Defection in American History," 555.

⁴⁸ Trende, *The Lost Majority*, 27.

were beginning to happen with more regularity, and the Wesberry decision probably contributed to some of them.

All told, Republicans captured a narrow 158-153 advantage in the non-southern United States in the 1966 House elections. But Democrats easily maintained the overall majority thanks to a 95-29 edge in the 14 states of the Greater South.

1968-1970: Years of stasis

House maps remained in flux after the 1966 election, as 17 states redrew again in advance of the 1968 election. That election took place in the shadow of the then-raging Vietnam war, the decision of President Johnson not to seek reelection, the assassinations of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. and presidential aspirant Sen. Robert Kennedy (D-NY), the chaos of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and the emergence of a rare, credible third-party presidential nominee in segregationist George Wallace, a Democrat who ran under the banner of the American Independent Party. And yet, despite all of the churn, very little changed in the House: Republicans netted just five seats, allowing Democrats to maintain their solid majority.

Redistricting may have contributed to the modest GOP gains in subtle ways. For instance, the House opted to prohibit statewide at-large House districts in states that had more than one House member prior to the 1968 election, in part as a way to prevent states from using such districts as a way to dilute minority representation. Congress acted to promote “increased minority participation, political influence, and representation.”⁴⁹ This impacted New Mexico, which prior to the House’s statewide district prohibition had

⁴⁹ Dow, *Electing the House*, 186.

elected both of its House members at large. The adoption of districts combined with Nixon's strong showing in the state helped Republicans defeat both previously statewide Democratic House incumbents.⁵⁰

The previously mentioned Texas redistricting prior to the 1966 elections gave further representation to the state's growing metropolitan areas, and the state modified the districts again in advance of 1968. One of the new districts created before the 1966 elections was TX-3, which covered west Dallas. Conservative Rep. Jim Pool (D) died, and wealthy businessman James Collins (R) won the district in an August 1968 special election and would hold it into the early 1980s. So here again is an instance of a Republican House victory that may have been owed at least in part to reapportionment boosting the representation of growing metropolitan areas in the South. Democratic presidential nominee Hubert Humphrey would narrowly win Texas in 1968, but Nixon ran about a dozen points ahead of his statewide share of the two-party vote in TX-3, meaning that the district voted considerably more Republican than both the nation and the state.

New York adopted new House districts under a court order in advance of 1968, starting a period of four straight House elections contested in the state under modified lines. The redistricting shuffled some districts, although the end result did not change the makeup of the state's 26-15 Democratic House delegation. However, that election did produce some notable new members of the House: Shirley Chisholm (D), who in 1972 became the first African-American woman to seek a major party presidential nomination,

⁵⁰ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1972*, 504-506.

won election to a new Brooklyn district drawn to be “all but certain to send a Negro to Congress.”⁵¹ Meanwhile, future Mayor Ed Koch (D) won the wealthy and typically Republican “Silk Socking” district in Manhattan, previously represented by liberal Republicans like John Lindsay (R), then mayor of New York City. Next door in New Jersey, “Republicans replaced a temporary Democratic districting scheme with one of their own for the 1968 election,” but despite pre-election predictions suggesting they would make gains, they did not, although the map did preserve the two-seat gain they had made in 1966.⁵²

Wallace’s presence as a disruptive, southern-focused third-party candidate did not have any clear impact on the South’s House delegation, even though Wallace comfortably carried five southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi) and ran well ahead of his national share of the vote (13.5%) throughout the 11 states of the old Confederacy. Republicans netted only two seats in the South in 1968—one was the aforementioned Texas seat that Collins technically won before the 1968 election, and the other was in North Carolina. That district, created prior to the 1968 election in a Tar Heel State redistricting, “was clearly a marginal district”⁵³ when drawn, and it included both Winston-Salem and also some historically Republican northwestern turf in a state that otherwise was part of the Democratic Solid South (part of this district abutted eastern Tennessee, previously mentioned as a Republican southern zone dating back to the Civil War). Wilmer “Vinegar Bend” Mizell (R), a former Major League

⁵¹ Earl Caldwell, “3 Negroes Weigh House Race in New Brooklyn 12th District,” *New York Times*, Feb. 26, 1968, <https://www.nytimes.com/1968/02/26/archives/3-negroes-weigh-house-race-in-new-brooklyn-12th-district.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

⁵² Erikson, “Malapportionment, Gerrymandering, and Party Fortunes,” 1242.

⁵³ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1972*, 593.

Baseball pitcher, won the open seat in a close contest. Mizell likely was helped by Nixon's showing—Nixon carried the district with 48% of the vote, while Wallace and Hubert Humphrey (D) effectively split the remainder of the vote. There were two other seats that flipped in the Greater South that year effectively canceled each other out: A Democrat won an open Republican seat in West Virginia, and a Republican won an open Democratic seat in Virginia.

With Nixon in the White House, the generic midterm advantage typically enjoyed by the party not holding the White House shifted to the Democrats, although 1970 also was a year of only modest change in the House as the Democrats netted a dozen seats over the course of the cycle (some of these gains came in special elections in 1969, when long-serving Rep. David Obey of Wisconsin and a couple of other Democrats first won their seats). Among the Democratic victories were some oddities, like the Democrats winning both of South Dakota's districts, which were both Republican-held open seats. "The state's Democrats took advantage of the discontent among the voters with the farm policies of the Nixon Administration," while also being aided by the eccentricities of the Republican candidate in SD-2, who "proposed that the government set up compulsory youth camps to teach 'decency and respect for the law.'"⁵⁴ Observers cited farm policy as a reason for some of the other Democratic gains that year, such as in a northwestern Minnesota district (MN-7).⁵⁵ In fact, about half of the Democrats' total net gains came from the sparsely-populated Interior West, of which northwestern Minnesota is not

⁵⁴ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1972*, 754.

⁵⁵ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1972*, 410.

technically a part but might as well be. Democrats netted the at-large seats in Alaska and Wyoming that year as well.

Redistricting had nothing to do with these gains, and the pace of redistricting slowed in 1970 overall as states had settled into Wesberry's dictums. One of the few states to redistrict was New York, which was holding its final election before ceding to California the title of holding the nation's largest House delegation (California had passed New York as the most populous state in 1964,⁵⁶ which it has remained ever since). The Supreme Court threw out the Empire State map in 1969, leading to gleeful Republican predictions that they would pick up a half-dozen seats or more thanks to a map created by the state's GOP-held government. "We can draw beautiful lines that can be as compact as a good cigar and still achieve a switch of six to eight seats for our side," an unnamed Republican redistricting expert predicted.⁵⁷ But "despite great skill in redrawing the lines just before the 1970 elections,"⁵⁸ Republicans fell short of lofty predictions, netting only an extra two seats from New York as a number of popular Democrats in difficult districts nonetheless proved too entrenched to defeat. One consequence of the new map was that it added some white liberal parts of Manhattan's Upper West Side to NY-18, a district centered on Harlem, an African-American enclave represented by long-serving Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (D). Powell, who faced corruption allegations and had been excluded from taking his seat in the House (he

⁵⁶ "California Takes Population Lead," *New York Times*, Sept. 1, 1964, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/09/01/archives/california-takes-population-lead-but-new-york-is-still-ahead-in.html>.

⁵⁷ Sidney E. Zion, "State Republicans See a Gain of 6 to 8 House Seats," *New York Times*, April 8, 1969, <https://www.nytimes.com/1969/04/08/archives/state-republicans-see-a-gain-of-6-to-8-house-seats.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

⁵⁸ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics* 1972, 510.

eventually won a Supreme Court case to regain it), had been severely weakened, but he likely would have won reelection had his district not been changed. As it was, Charlie Rangel (D) beat Powell by just 150 votes, and he won the new portion of the district by more than 1,500.⁵⁹ Rangel would serve in Congress for more than four decades. Another noteworthy new member of the New York House delegation elected in 1970 was Jack Kemp (R), a former Buffalo Bills quarterback who won an open seat in western New York. Kemp would become a prominent Republican thought leader on economic policy and was Bob Dole's running mate on the 1996 Republican presidential ticket.

1972: Nixon's lonely landslide

In 1972, Nixon ran for reelection and benefited from a weak opponent, Sen. George McGovern (D-SD), an anti-Vietnam war candidate who Nixon successfully pilloried as too far to the left. But despite Nixon's huge 60.7%-37.5% national victory, Republicans only picked up a dozen House seats, a simple reversal of the Democrats' modest 1970 gains.

The GOP gains in 1972 might have been even smaller had it not been for the post-1970 reapportionment, which took effect in 1972. The reapportionment continued what would be a decades-long trend: Generally faster growth in the Sun Belt pushed more House seats from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and West. There were exceptions, though. Alabama and Tennessee were among the losers in 1970, along with Iowa, North Dakota, Ohio, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. All lost one seat apiece. New York and Pennsylvania each lost two. Meanwhile, California gained five, Florida gained

⁵⁹ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1972*, 543.

three, and Arizona, Colorado, and Texas gained one each. All told, the shuffle likely netted the Republicans an additional seat.

Post-Wesberry, states now had to redistrict based on population changes within their states based on the decennial census, and nearly every state created new maps in advance of the 1972 election. As is clear from the modest net change overall, the redistricting did not lead to dramatic shifts in state House delegations, although on balance Republicans seemed to catch more breaks than Democrats.

One of those was in Illinois, where a federal court broke a legislative stalemate by adopting a map submitted by Republican legislators, including future U.S. Reps. Henry Hyde and Edward Madigan.⁶⁰ The court's decision helped Republicans net an extra two seats in the Land of Lincoln. To the east, in Indiana, Republicans redrew IN-11 in Indianapolis to go after Rep. Andrew Jacobs, Jr. (D). The remap worked, and minister William Hudnut III (R) narrowly defeated Jacobs, though he would win the seat back two years later.⁶¹

Other redistricting plans involved self-inflicted wounds. In Connecticut, Democrats ended up moving some Republican parts of CT-4 (a Republican-held seat) into CT-5, a Democratic seat they thought could take on additional Republican voters. The end result was that not only did they fail to win CT-4, but adding more Republican voters to CT-5 allowed Republicans to win it, too.⁶² Republicans also picked up a seat in Maryland, despite Democrats controlling the redistricting process, after the creation of

⁶⁰ Richard M Rogers, "Illinois Redistricting History Since 1970," Illinois General Assembly Research Response, May 28, 2008, <http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lru/28.RedistrictingSince1970.pdf>.

⁶¹ "House: Republican Gain of 12, New Count of 244–191." *CQ Almanac 1972*, 28th ed., 1020-1032. Washington, DC: *Congressional Quarterly*, 1973. <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal72-1249887>.

⁶² Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 177.

MD-4, a district that connected the Baltimore and Washington, DC suburbs but was dominated by Anne Arundel County (Annapolis). A Democratic remap in Tennessee “[d]esigned to help the Democrats... failed miserably,”⁶³ allowing Republicans to take a five-to-three edge in the state’s delegation. In Dallas’ TX-5, conservative Rep. Earle Cabell (D) had a tough primary in 1970 and “made arrangements with friendly members of the legislature” to remove some African-American areas that had fueled the primary insurgency. Cabell’s primary problems were solved, but removing some reliably Democratic voters probably hurt him in the general election, which he lost to a Republican, although given that Cabell lost by a dozen points, he may have lost under the old lines, too.⁶⁴

Democrats did gerrymander effectively in other places. For example, in Massachusetts, the Democratic state legislature eliminated some Republican territory from MA-12, the district covering Cape Cod. That prompted conservative incumbent Rep. Hastings Keith (R), who had already faced a spirited primary and general election challenge in 1970, to retire. Gerry Studds (D), Keith’s 1970 opponent, ended up winning the seat.⁶⁵ Studds would serve for a quarter century, becoming the first openly gay member of Congress, a disclosure he made after the revelation of a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old male congressional page led to the House censuring him in 1983.⁶⁶ The same combination of Democratic-controlled redistricting and a tougher-than-expected challenge in the 1970 election prompted Rep. Page Belcher (R, OK-1) to retire

⁶³ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 951.

⁶⁴ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 974.

⁶⁵ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 462-463.

⁶⁶ Steven V. Roberts, “House Censures Crane and Studds for Sexual Relations with Pages,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1983, <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/07/21/us/house-censures-crane-and-studds-for-sexual-relations-with-pages.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

in 1972, and a Democrat took his Tulsa-based seat. Republicans returned the favor in Colorado by targeting 12-term Rep. Wayne Aspinall (D, CO-4), who as chairman of the Interior Committee enraged environmentalists and attracted a primary challenger in 1970. State Republicans redrew his district, removing some of Aspinall's home base and added some more liberal-leaning areas. The shifts did the trick: Aspinall lost a primary, and then a Republican won the district in November.⁶⁷

The South continued to show some signs of growing Republicanism. In Louisiana, David Treen (R) became the first Republican to represent that state in Congress in the 20th century, winning an open seat after two previous failed House bids and an unsuccessful gubernatorial run in 1971 (he would later win a single term as governor in 1979). Treen's victory, like other GOP House wins in the South, was fueled by strength in suburban areas (LA-3, the district he won, contained a significant portion of suburban New Orleans).⁶⁸

In the wake of landmark civil rights legislation passed in the 1960s, black voters began to emerge from their Jim Crow-enforced exclusion from the electorate in the South, and by 1972 their votes started to have a real effect on results, both in electing African Americans to the House and otherwise impacting elections, sometimes to the benefit of Republicans. In suburban Atlanta, court-ordered redistricting prompted one of the Republicans elected in the 1966 Georgia GOP breakthrough, Rep. Fletcher Thompson (R, GA-5), to unsuccessfully seek a Senate seat. The district, redrawn in such a way that made it more amenable to electing an African American, elected Andrew Young (D), a

⁶⁷ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 160-161.

⁶⁸ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 393.

civil rights leader whom Thompson had defeated in 1970. Young would go on to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and as mayor of Atlanta. In Mississippi, two Republicans won election to the House: future senators Thad Cochran and Trent Lott. In Cochran's case, he won with just 48% of the vote as an independent black candidate took 8% of the vote. This was "the first congressional contest in Mississippi where black voters clearly played a critical role in the outcome."⁶⁹ And while her victory did not affect the overall House math in Texas, Barbara Jordan (D) won her first term to a Houston House seat that she maneuvered to have drawn for herself while she was serving in the Texas state Senate.⁷⁰ Jordan and Young became the first African Americans elected to the House from southern states in the 20th century.

Republicans also picked up two other southern seats with indirect assists from emerging black electorates. In VA-4, long-serving conservative Rep. Watkins Abbitt (D) opted to retire after his home was drawn out of his district and the district had become more African American, potentially threatening him in a primary. He was replaced by a Republican.⁷¹ In SC-6, another conservative House institution, Rep. John McMillan (D), lost a primary runoff in 1972 to a more liberal Democrat who won "the vast majority of the black votes."⁷² Like in VA-4, a Republican replaced a conservative Democrat defeated in a primary, although the new Republican would lose to the liberal Democrat who beat McMillan in the rosier Democratic environment of 1974.

⁶⁹ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 545.

⁷⁰ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 1002-1003.

⁷¹ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 1042.

⁷² Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1974*, 926.

All in all, it is hard to argue with the assessment of political scientists Amihai Glazer, Bernard Grofman, Marc Robbins in their analysis of the post-1970 redistricting round, at least in terms of the partisan makeup of Congress: “on balance congressional redistricting in the 1970s preserved the status quo; that is, neither party gained at the expense of the other.”⁷³

Republicans, meanwhile, made only a minor dent in the Democratic House majority, which had now gone uninterrupted since the Democrats retook the chamber in 1954 after a two-year hiatus. The GOP would fall further behind in 1974, a classic midterm backlash year.

1974: The Watergate wave

Republicans got a preview of what awaited them in the 1974 midterm in a series of special House elections held in the first half of the year. Democrats won five previously Republican-held seats.⁷⁴ That included the typically very Republican MI-5 based in Grand Rapids, which former House Minority Leader Gerald Ford (R) left behind when President Nixon made him vice president to replace Spiro Agnew, who resigned under the strain of legal questions. Among the special election victors in 1974 was then-state Rep. John Murtha (D) in PA-12, a Western Pennsylvania district. Murtha would serve for more than 35 years.

⁷³ Glazer, Grofman, and Robbins, “Partisan and Incumbency Effects of 1970s Congressional Redistricting,” 680.

⁷⁴ Greg Giroux, “U.S. House Special Elections, 1957-Present,” Google Document, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1DX4nvZ32rQQeU6B-zc_khCFg7b35ezeXtJYG3bIOUDo/edit#gid=0.

The special election losses “helped convince Republicans that Nixon needed to resign,”⁷⁵ as the Watergate scandal engulfed his presidency. Nixon would resign in August, but his exit would not prevent big Republican losses that November, when Democrats netted 48 House seats.

The maps used in the 1974 elections were generally the same as those used in 1972, although there a few big states provided exceptions. New York’s seemingly ever-changing maps again were modified, though only slightly and only within New York City. Much more importantly, California drew new maps after the state Supreme Court threw out a previous plan that essentially protected incumbents and divided the five new seats California added after the 1970 census (Democrats got three extra seats from reapportionment in California in the 1972 election, and Republicans got two). Under the new map, and with the political winds at their back, Democrats would net five new seats in California, giving them a 28-15 advantage in the largest House delegation. Texas, another megastate, also had to draw new districts because the U.S. Supreme Court, in *White v. Weiser*, determined that the district populations “were not as mathematically equal as reasonably possible,” thus reiterating the Wesberry standard.⁷⁶ In the short term, though, the new districts did not lead to much change: Democrats netted a seat, TX-13, a North Texas seat whose transformation had occurred in a previous redistricting.

Much of the rest of the Democratic gains seemed to be part of the usual midterm trend that was exacerbated in 1974 by Watergate. Democrats, for instance, netted five seats from Indiana, a typically Republican state then and now at the presidential level but

⁷⁵ Cohen and Barnes, *Almanac of American Politics* 2016, 937.

⁷⁶ *White v. Weiser*, 412 U.S. 783 (1973).

at the time was “a fairly good barometer of national opinion in state and congressional races.”⁷⁷ The pro-Republican district maps in Illinois and New York collapsed under the burden of the Watergate wave as Democrats netted three seats from the Land of Lincoln and five from the Empire State. Minor redistricting completed in advance of the 1974 election did not contribute to the results in New York state: all of the Democratic gains came from outside the Five Boroughs, where districts were unchanged. Democrats picked up another five seats between 1972 and 1974 from Michigan, including Richard Vander Veen’s (D) surprising victory in the MI-5 special, which he would hold in November. Another came from Rep. Don Riegle’s decision to switch parties over the Vietnam war and other issues, which he did in early 1973. Riegle ran for the Senate as a Democrat in 1976 and won the first of three terms.

Republicans lost ground all over the country, including in the South, losing eight net seats. Georgia reverted to a 10-0 Democratic delegation, and Republicans lost two seats apiece in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Coming close to winning a House seat in 1974 was future President Bill Clinton (D), who challenged the aforementioned Rep. John Paul Hammerschmidt (R, AR-3) and lost by less than four points.

But there were Republican victories in the region, too. In Florida’s pre-1972 redistricting, the Democrats who ran the process created a new seat in Central Florida designed to be won by state Sen. Bill Gunter (D). But he mounted an unsuccessful Senate bid immediately following his election to the House, and Richard Kelly (R) won the

⁷⁷ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1976*, 263.

seat.⁷⁸ In Louisiana, Treen received some Republican reinforcement, although that new member did not technically win until 1975. The Baton Rouge-based LA-6 had been represented since the 1966 election by Rep. John Rarick (D), “the most rabidly right wing member of the House.” Rarick “could be counted on to reprint in the *Congressional Record* just about any far right, anti-Semitic, or anti-black bilge that came across his desk.”⁷⁹ Rarick’s behavior was so outrageous, even in a conservative district, that he lost the 1974 Democratic primary to a Baton Rouge sportscaster, Jeff LaCaze (D). He would face W. Henson Moore III (R), more of a natural ideological heir to Rarick. A very close result coupled with a voting machine problem prompted the Louisiana Supreme Court to order a new election, which Moore won in 1975. With Moore’s victory, Republicans had expanded their foothold in Louisiana, and this foothold endured and later expanded—the state has elected at least two Republicans to the House in every election since 1974, and throughout the 2010s they held five of the state’s six House seats.

Conclusion

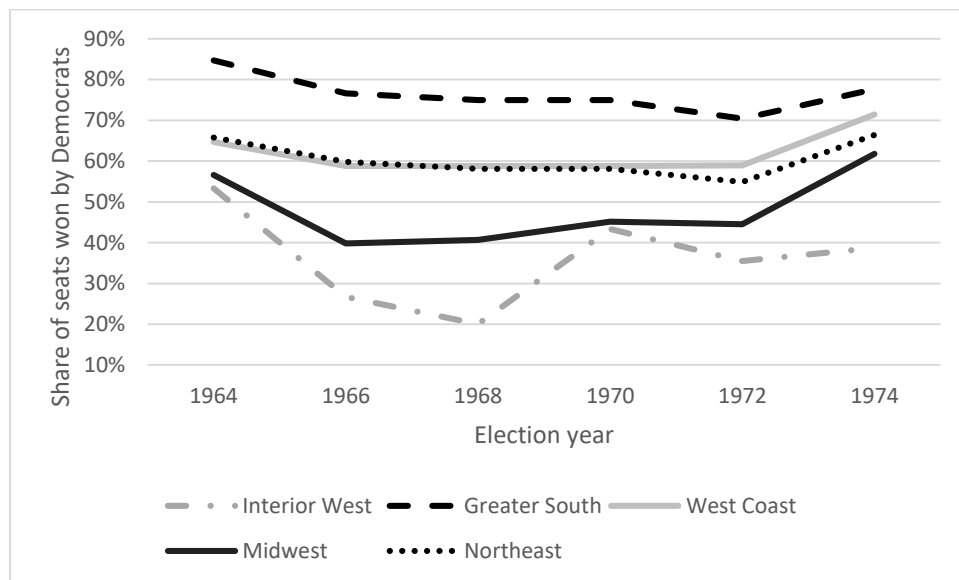
In comparing the Democrats’ House majorities of 1964 and 1974, one finds some contrasting trends in the regional distribution of the Democrats’ power. The Democrats were strong throughout the time period in both the Northeast and the West Coast, which would become the party’s political stronghold at all levels by the 1990s. The sparsely-populated Interior West was generally Republican in this period, with a slim Democratic majority in 1964 a clear aberration that was reversed to a clear GOP edge even in 1974. The Midwest, consistently a swing region, oscillated between the two parties in the

⁷⁸ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1976*, 170-171.

⁷⁹ Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac of American Politics 1976*, 338.

House throughout this era, producing a majority Democratic delegation only in the big Democratic years of 1964 and 1974, and voting for more Republicans than Democrats in the intervening elections of 1966-1972. And then there was the Greater South, which shifted from an overwhelming 105-19 Democratic majority in 1964 to a slightly less imposing 97-28. Democrats would largely rule the South for another two decades, but cracks in their dominance were beginning to show. These regional shifts in the Democratic caucus are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Regional share of House seats won by Democrats, 1964-1974



Source: Compiled by author.

Did the Reapportionment Revolution have a major partisan impact? Likely not. Table 2 shows the House results in states that did and did not redistrict in 1964, 1966, and 1968, when states responded to the Supreme Court's one person, one vote mandate. As table 2 indicates, there's not a clear indication that one side or the other was

disadvantaged by redistricting (or non-redistricting) in any of these three election cycles overall, although as noted throughout Chapter One, individual state results varied.

Table 2: Net House change in states by districting status, 1964-1968

	New districts?	No. of districts	Percentage of whole (435)	Net change	Total change	Share of total change
1964	Redistricted	61	14%	D +2	D +37	5%
	Not redistricted	374	86%	D +35		95%
1966	Redistricted	207	48%	R +23	R +47	49%
	Not redistricted	228	52%	R +24		51%
1968	Redistricted	203	47%	0	R +5	0%
	Not redistricted	232	53%	R +5		100%

Note: Some districts were redrawn more than once in this timeframe; statewide, at-large districts are included in the “not redistricted” tally.

Source: Compiled by author.

Ultimately, the House elections in this period conformed largely to what one might’ve expected based on larger historical patterns in American politics. In 1964, the Democrats had a hugely successful election in large part because of the weakness of the Republican presidential nominee, Barry Goldwater, whose candidacy nonetheless contributed to some Republican breakthroughs in the conservative but still overwhelmingly Democratic South. That election created an unusually large Democratic House majority even by the standards of that era, and the Democratic numbers fell in 1966 (in part because of Johnson’s unpopularity) and 1968, although they still held a healthy majority in both elections. Democrats made some gains in 1970, although they were relatively minor in part because Democrats already held so many seats and because

Nixon was not really a drag at that time. In an age of immense ticket-splitting, Nixon's 1972 landslide only produced minimal House gains, and then Democrats made large gains amidst the shadow of Watergate in 1974. The flood of new districts made contributions to these shifts but it's hard to say they made a huge impact on the size of either the Democratic or Republican House caucuses independent of the larger political trends of the era. District maps designed to help one side over the other, like New York's pro-Republican map in 1970, sometimes produced smaller gains than observers may have predicted. Others, like the Illinois map in 1972, helped Republicans that year but did not prevent Democrats from regaining lost ground two years later.

At the same time, reapportionment and redistricting did create new electoral opportunities. Wesberry provided more representation to growing suburban areas. This likely benefited Republicans in the South given that GOP strength already was percolating in the suburbs in this era. Now, the emergence of House Republicans in the South probably would have happened anyway, especially because Republican gains in the South were not limited to suburban areas and were tied to some other factors that had nothing to do with redistricting, like Goldwater's candidacy in 1964 and the slow but steady ideological realignment of the parties, which would continue for the rest of the 20th century and into the next.

Chapter 2: The Roots of the Republican Revolution: 1976-1994

In 1994, political scientists William F. Connelly, Jr. and John J. Pitney, Jr. released a book entitled *Congress' Permanent Minority? Republicans in the U.S. House*.⁸⁰ They were wise to include the question mark in their study: By the time the year was out, the seemingly permanent minority had won the majority. One could hardly blame Connelly and Pitney—or anyone, really, including President Clinton—from wondering whether Republicans in the House might be a permanent minority. They really were that for four decades. Not only had they not won the majority since 1954, but they hadn't even reached 200 seats in the 435-seat body in any election since 1956.

So how did the Republicans finally win the House in 1994 after spending the previous 40 years in the wilderness? Did their gains come all at once, or did they gradually build their path to the majority over time?

What becomes clear through a long-range, district-by-district analysis is that while it may have felt at the time that the Republican gains came almost all at once—in the form of the GOP landslide in 1994—the Republican additions, at least in part, came gradually over the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s as the Republicans chipped away at the huge majorities the Democrats had won and maintained in the 1974 and 1976 elections. Republicans also held their ground in midterm elections during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, avoiding the kind of blowout seat losses that have often defined midterms for the presidential party. A combination of reapportionment and redistricting, as well as realignment, helped build the Republican majority, as well as

⁸⁰ Connelly and Pitney, *Congress' Permanent Minority?*

a growing trend of partisan conflict and polarization. So, too, did the Democrats capturing the White House in 1992, for reasons that a close reading of American electoral history makes clear.

Literature review: Redistricting, race, and realignment

The Republican victory in 1994, and the roughly two decades of House elections leading up to it starting in 1976, is the focus of this analysis. This review will assess some of the reasons for why scholars believed the Democratic stranglehold on the House lasted as long as it did and, then, what ultimately contributed to the Republicans finally taking control.

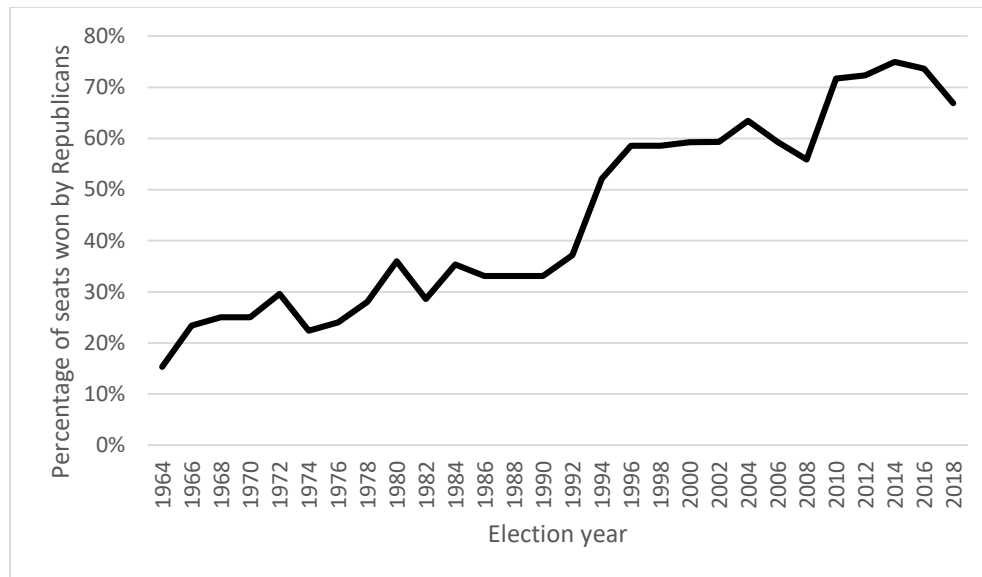
The Greater South looms large in the analysis. Indeed, the Democrats' ability to hold on to a healthy House majority from the region even as Republican presidential strength there grew was a major factor in their continued House control into the 1990s.

The 1976 presidential election, when southerner Jimmy Carter (D) swept the entire South outside of Virginia, represented something of a last gasp for Democrats in southern presidential politics: Carter would be the last Democrat to win a majority of the electoral votes from a region that historically had been heavily Democratic (albeit also very conservative). But the old Democratic "Solid South" had shown signs of erosion in the aftermath of World War II at the presidential level, and Barry Goldwater's (R) 1964 presidential candidacy, in which he ran against federal civil rights legislation, allowed him to win several racially-conservative southern states even as he was being defeated in a landslide nationally. Goldwater's small-government conservatism also stood in stark contrast to President Lyndon Johnson's (D) liberalism on other issues, and conservative

Republicans would eventually become a better fit for the conservative South than Democrats, liberal or otherwise. In 1964, Goldwater’s victory contributed to a small net increase in House Republicans from the South even as Republicans were losing about three dozen net seats nationally that year. Throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Republican strength grew in the South, although by 1974 the GOP was up to only about a quarter of the seats in the South. That would grow to about a third in subsequent elections, but the Republicans found it difficult to get over that relatively small share throughout the 1980s. “Tracing the pace of Republican gains strongly suggests that partisan change was gradual,” political scientist David Lublin argued, with key points of growth coming in 1964, 1980, and 1994. Democrats would recover after these elections, “but they almost always have not regained fully their previous level of support,” Lublin also observed.⁸¹ This gradual pattern is apparently in figure 2, which shows the Republican seat share in the Greater South from 1964-2018. Notably, Lublin’s earlier observation—Republicans making jumps at various points and then largely consolidating those gains—also seems present in the 2010s, as the GOP’s share of districts in the Greater South spiked again in the party’s 2010 wave (although it backslid a bit in the 2018 Democratic midterm victory).

⁸¹ Lublin, *Republican South*, 6.

Figure 2: Republican share of House seats in the Greater South, 1964-2018



Source: Compiled by author.

From 1953 to 1993, the Republicans held the presidency for 28 of a possible 40 years, and they won the presidency five out of six elections from 1968-1988. The South was very much a part of those victories. Yet there was a different story below the ballot: “Since the late 1960s the persisting Democratic advantage at all levels of southern electoral politics below the presidential level has also successfully aborted the Republicans’ efforts to realign the national party system,”⁸² political scientist Nicol Rae wrote. Even in Ronald Reagan’s 1980 and 1984 presidential landslides, Democrats maintained control of the U.S. House, aided by a large southern delegation. Southern Democrats were “consistently able to hold districts and states that ha[d] decisively rejected Democratic presidential candidates,”⁸³ Rae found.

⁸² Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 3.

⁸³ Rae, *Southern Democrats*, 23.

Part of the reason for lingering Democratic dominance in the South was because of the ability of Democrats to tailor their candidacies to local concerns: “[A] reputation for sensitivity to local interests [wa]s bread and butter to congressional Democrats,”⁸⁴ wrote House expert Gary Jacobson. Another was the failure of Republicans to field strong candidates in the South (and elsewhere): Republicans suffered in this era from a dearth of high-quality candidates, which are defined by Jacobson as ones who had held elective office prior to running for Congress. Throughout much of the 1950s through the 1980s, Democratic House challengers were likelier to have prior experience running for office, Jacobson found.⁸⁵ Lublin agreed that “a lack of candidates impeded GOP efforts to expand their base of officeholders in the region for many years.”⁸⁶

Republicans also may have suffered, at least in the eyes of some of the party’s internal critics in the 1970s and 1980s, from a lack of effort in trying to seek the majority. Political scientist Frances Lee traced the rise of a perpetual campaign for Congress and the decline in bipartisanship to the 1980 election, when Republicans made major gains that opened their eyes to the possibility of winning the majority and incentivized them against bipartisanship and for conflict that “is strategically engineered in the quest for political advantage as the two parties do battle for majority control” (Democrats, who had lost control of the Senate that year, took similar lessons from 1980).⁸⁷ In other words, the Republicans’ recognition in 1980 that the Democratic majority in the House was not necessarily permanent may have prompted them to fight harder for the majority instead

⁸⁴ Jacobson, *Electoral Origins of Divided Government*, 133.

⁸⁵ Jacobson, *Electoral Origins of Divided Government*, 62.

⁸⁶ Lublin, *Republican South*, 18.

⁸⁷ Lee, *Insecure Majorities*, 12.

of acquiescing to working within the framework of the longstanding Democratic majorities.

The Democrats benefited from some structural advantages in the earlier part of this era, such as typically more influence over the congressional redistricting process. For instance, in 1982, Democrats made more than half of their overall gains that year in the 17 states where they had complete control over the post-1980 census redistricting process, political scientist Alan Abramowitz found.⁸⁸

But Democrats found themselves on the wrong side of post-1990 redistricting in large part because of the creation of additional majority-minority congressional districts. Key legislative and judicial decisions in the 1980s prompted the U.S. Department of Justice under President George H.W. Bush (R) to push southern states, which had both significant minority populations and which often required federal approval for redistricting, to create more districts with significant minority populations. The Justice Department had sway over these districts because of the Voting Rights Act's Section Five, which stipulated that certain jurisdictions (including many southern states) receive DOJ preclearance for any voting changes they decide to make. That included new congressional districts. Given that racial minorities, and African Americans in particular, vote much more often for Democrats as opposed to Republicans, the creation of such districts can "leave surrounding districts whiter and more conservative—and produce a net gain for the Republicans."⁸⁹ For Republicans, the push for majority-minority districts presented what legal expert and political scientist Maurice Cunningham argued was "the

⁸⁸ Abramowitz, "Partisan Redistricting and the 1982 Congressional Elections," 770.

⁸⁹ Cunningham, *Maximization, Whatever the Cost*, 6.

delicious irony of doing well while seeming to do good,”⁹⁰ meaning that they could argue for a more diverse Congress and pursue a policy of majority-minority district maximization, knowing that it would benefit them electorally.

And it did. “[T]here is evidence that Democrats lost about ten seats in 1994 due to racial redistricting,” political scientist David Canon argued,⁹¹ and Cunningham pegged the scholarly consensus on Democratic losses in 1992 and 1994 because of racial redistricting at between seven to 12 seats.⁹²

Because the Republicans won 230 seats in the 1994 elections, they could have survived the loss of the net seats afforded them through racial redistricting, but their majority was smaller in subsequent Congresses, so it’s possible that, without racial redistricting, Democrats may have been able to win the House sometime between 1994 and 2006, the dozen years where Republicans held power before the Democrats recaptured the chamber.

However, that also means that racial redistricting was not the decisive factor in the GOP’s 1994 takeover, and that it was probably only a matter of time before the Republicans took a majority of the House seats in the South, which they did for the first time in 1994. Indeed, “[o]ne should emphasize that racial redistricting nevertheless remained a decidedly secondary problem for the Democrats compared to the more critical problem of white voters shifting to the GOP,” Lublin argued.⁹³

⁹⁰ Cunningham, *Maximization, Whatever the Cost*, 43.

⁹¹ Canon, *Race, Redistricting, and Representation*, 12.

⁹² Cunningham, *Maximization, Whatever the Cost*, 6.

⁹³ Lublin, *Republican South*, 112.

The shift of southern whites from the Democrats to the Republicans did not happen all at once, but rather occurred gradually over several decades following World War II. Political scientist Seth McKee found through the American National Election Studies that by the early 1990s Republican identification finally overtook Democratic identification among southern whites, helping the GOP realize their potential in the consistently conservative South.⁹⁴

Other changes were afoot in this era. Divided government was the norm in the 1970s and 1980s, featuring largely Republican presidents, a Democratic House, and (mostly) a Democratic Senate: Republicans held the Upper Chamber from 1981-1987, while Democrats otherwise controlled it from 1955-1995. Therefore, Jacobson said that Americans simply became used to this governing arrangement, and liked it: Americans grew “increasingly content with divided control of the federal government”⁹⁵ and Democratic “control of Congress expresses, rather than thwarts, the popular will.”⁹⁶

Analysts in the late 1980s noticed the persistence of divided government and observed that there might be only one way for Republicans to take the House: A Democrat winning the White House. That’s because changes in power in the House usually occur in midterm elections and involve the presidential party losing the majority: “The Republicans probably must lose a presidential election in order to position themselves to take a majority ... It is virtually impossible for a party to strengthen its position in the House at the same time that it occupies the White House,”⁹⁷ long-time

⁹⁴ McKee, *Republican Ascendancy in Southern U.S. House Elections*, 53.

⁹⁵ Jacobson, *Electoral Origins of Divided Government*, 119.

⁹⁶ Jacobson, *Electoral Origins of Divided Government*, 133.

⁹⁷ Mann, “Is the House Unresponsive to Change?” 277.

congressional analyst Thomas Mann argued in the late 1980s. Since 1900, the House has flipped partisan control 11 times, and nine of those turnovers occurred in midterm years, including the last five (1954, 1994, 2006, 2010, and 2018). “[W]ithout midterm elections,” political scientist Andrew Busch argued, “divided government would be much less likely.”⁹⁸ As noted in Chapter One, midterm losses for the party that controls the White House are a common feature of American politics. Therefore, it’s not unreasonable to conclude, as political scientist Robert Erikson did, that “losing the presidency is a stepping stone to midterm victory.”⁹⁹

So something vital happened in 1992: Democrats, after a dozen years spent locked out of the White House, elected a president. Two years later, they lost the House.

The House at the Bicentennial

In the aftermath of the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the United States hosted one of its most competitive presidential elections.

Jimmy Carter (D), a former Georgia governor, won the national popular vote by about two percentage points over Gerald Ford (R), the unelected incumbent who took over after Richard Nixon (R) resigned in 1974, with margins smaller than that in two states (Ohio and Wisconsin) that, had they voted for Ford, would have given him, and not Carter, an Electoral College majority.

But despite the very competitive presidential race, the U.S. Congress was dominated by Democrats. The party had held both the House and the Senate for more

⁹⁸ Busch, *Horses in Midstream*, 22.

⁹⁹ Erikson, “Why the Democrats Lose Presidential Elections,” 31.

than two decades and enjoyed lopsided majorities in both chambers. In the House, Democrats netted a single seat, electing a 292-143 House majority.

That stability in the size of the Democrats' House delegation was matched by stability in the congressional district lines for the first time since the Supreme Court's reapportionment decisions upending congressional districting schemes that did not have equal population among districts. In every election year since 1964, the first election since the reapportionment decisions, at least some states redrew their districting lines for one reason or another. But in 1976, the district lines were the same as they were in 1974 across the country—and none changed in 1978 and 1980 either.

In the 1974 election, the Democrats won a clear majority of the House districts in four of the nation's five regions—the only exception was in the sparsely populated and usually conservative Interior West, where Republicans won 19 of 31 seats (less than 10% of the 435 total seats). Otherwise, Democrats held large majorities in the Northeast (75-38), the Greater South (97-28), and the West Coast (40-16), and they also were up 68-42 in the Midwest, a region where Republicans had generally held the majority over the previous decade. It is not a stretch to say that the Democrats dominated almost everywhere, not a surprise when a party holds about two-thirds of all the seats.

The 1976 election shuffled the Democratic majority slightly, though its size remained constant. The biggest Democratic gain came in Pennsylvania, where the party netted three seats, mostly because they were able to win open seats after Republican incumbents retired. Democrats also netted two seats from Ohio, one because Don Pease (D) replaced liberal Republican Charles Mosher, who had retired from a Northeast Ohio district (OH-13) that a normal Republican wouldn't have had much business holding. The

other Democratic takeover in Ohio came in Cincinnati. Former Rep. Tom Luken (D) won a 1974 special election in OH-1 but then lost in November. He ran in a different Cincinnati-area seat and beat Rep. Don Clancy (R, OH-2).

Republicans netted individual seats in a handful of states. Some of their victories came against Democrats aided by the Watergate wave two years earlier, like Reps. Tim Lee Hall (D, IL-15) and Richard Vander Veen (D, MI-5). Vander Veen had won Ford's old Grand Rapids-based seat in a 1974 special election shocker and then held it in the fall, but he could not hold on against Kent County Prosecutor Harold Sawyer (R) with Ford himself on ballot as the GOP presidential nominee in 1976. Another Republican winner in 1976 was Dan Quayle (R, IN-4), who would go on to the Senate in 1980 and the vice presidency in 1988. Quayle beat a Democratic incumbent elected in 1970; the five newly-elected Indiana Democrats who won amidst the Watergate wave there all held their seats two years later. That was a major story of the election: The Democrats' 1974 Watergate class emerged from 1976 almost entirely intact.

Republicans did net two seats in the Greater South, winning open seats in Oklahoma City (OK-5) and Virginia's Northern Neck (VA-1). Republicans still effectively hold the Virginia seat to this day, and they only lost control of the Oklahoma City seat in a 2018 upset. In a sign of slow Republican progress in the conservative (but still Democratic at this time) South, the GOP won 30 of the 125 seats in the region in 1976 as an evangelical Christian Southern Democrat, Jimmy Carter, was sweeping the region outside of Virginia. Ten years earlier, Republicans had won an almost identical number—29 of 124—in the midst of a national Republican midterm wave. Relative to

national political trends, the Republicans were continuing to improve their standing in the Greater South.

The Democrats would never again reach a majority the size of the ones they held in 1974 and 1976.

1978-1980: Reagan and Republican renewal

Given how huge the Democratic majority was and the usual midterm trend that almost always benefits the party that does not hold the White House, the Republicans' House gains in 1978—15 net seats gained from their 1976 showing—don't seem all that impressive. Indeed, conservative *New York Times* columnist William Safire argued that “House Republican candidates blew it,” in part because Democratic candidates mimicked Republican messaging taking a conservative line on taxes.¹⁰⁰ Andrew Busch, the midterm scholar, wrote that “observers noted at the time the degree to which the low partisan seat turnover masked a radical change in the agenda, a shift to the right that persisted through the 1980s and 1990s.”¹⁰¹ As Busch argued, the tone of 1978—defined by small government conservatism and tax revolt, most notably through California's June passage of Proposition 13, which imposed a two-thirds legislative majority requirement to raise taxes—offered a preview of conservative Ronald Reagan's (R) election as president two years later and a rightward shift in American politics overall.

A key figure in the political battles to come in the 1980s and 1990s first won election to the House as part of that year's new crop of Republicans: Newt Gingrich (R),

¹⁰⁰ William Safire, “Dishing the Whigs,” *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1978, <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/11/09/archives/essay-dishing-the-whigs.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

¹⁰¹ Busch, *Horses in Midstream*, 107.

a college professor who had tried and failed to defeat a Democratic incumbent in a suburban Atlanta district in close contests in 1974 and 1976. Gingrich's persistence persuaded the Democrat, Rep. Jack Flynt (GA-6), to retire, giving Gingrich a clear path to the House. Gingrich was part of a five-seat net gain for Republicans in the Greater South, although the Republicans still won only 28% of the seats in the region. Republicans added a handful of seats apiece in the Midwest, Northeast, and West Coast, too. Some, like Gingrich, were emblematic of the party's combative, conservative, and southern-oriented future; others reflected the party's more moderate, northeastern past, like former state legislator Bill Green (R), who won a special election early in 1978 over former congresswoman and social activist Bella Abzug (D) in Manhattan after Rep. Ed Koch (D, NY-18) was elected New York City mayor in 1977. NY-18 was the very affluent Upper East Side-centered district known as the "Silk Stocking District." It generally preferred liberal Republicans, although it made an exception for Koch. Electing Green was a return to form even though Carter had won the district by 26 points in the 1976 presidential election (however, remember that nearly 30% of all districts voted for a different party for president and for the House in 1976, so this sort of crossover representation was not unusual at the time). Another noteworthy first-time winner in 1978 was Geraldine Ferraro (D, NY-9), who would go on to be the first woman on a major party presidential ticket when Walter Mondale (D) picked her in 1984.

Republicans gained even more seats in 1980, netting 34 across the country as Ronald Reagan defeated the unpopular, embattled Carter by about 10 points nationally and decisively in the Electoral College. The Democrats still had a 243-192 majority; however, because of the large conservative contingent in the Democratic delegation—

there were 46 House Democrats who were part of the Conservative Democratic Forum—Republicans had “effective control of the House, or something very close to it.”¹⁰² The conservative lean of a chunk of the Democratic caucus helped clear the way for Reagan’s 1981 tax cut package.

Close to a third of the Republican gains came in the Greater South, representing another GOP leap in the region. Some of these gains would immediately fade away—for instance, Republicans won two of the four seats in West Virginia after they had become open, and Democrats quickly won them back in 1982—but others would endure for decades, like a GOP victory in SC-1, then (and now) a district based in stately Charleston, and VA-10, based in Northern Virginia. Republicans would hold versions of these seats until 2018.

Republicans drew even in the Midwest, notching a 55-55 tie in that competitive region’s combined delegation (or a net gain of a half a dozen seats), and several of their gains there (and in other parts of the country) involved them winning seats that previously had been Republican but that Democrats had won in their strong elections of 1974 and/or 1976. Those districts included IL-10 (a wealthy suburban seat covering some of Chicago’s suburbs along Lake Michigan) and MN-6 (a district that extended from the state’s southwest corner all the way to the Twin Cities suburbs). Both of these Republican pickups came after the Democratic incumbents, Reps. Abner Mikva (IL-10)

¹⁰² Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics*, 1982, XXXV.

and Rick Nolan (MN-6), decided not to run for reelection after winning these districts in the more favorable political climate of 1974.¹⁰³

While those were open seats, Republicans largely beat Democratic incumbents to make their major gains in 1980, knocking off 27. Among the most prominent Democratic losers was Rep. Al Ullman (OR-2), a quarter-century veteran of the lower chamber and chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. He lost to Air Force veteran Denny Smith (R), who attacked Ullman for losing touch with the district and who likely benefited from Reagan's 19-point win in the Eastern Oregon district, which covers most of Oregon's land mass and is Republican to this day. Another Democrat hurt by Reagan was Rep. Gunn McKay (UT-1), who ran 26 points ahead of Reagan in his district but still lost by four points to Utah state House Speaker James Hansen (R).

Also contributing in a small way to Republican gains in 1980 was the Abscam scandal, an FBI sting operation that ensnared six members of the House, five of whom were Democrats. Republicans would end up defeating three of them in November 1980: Reps. Frank Thompson (NJ-4), John Murphy (NY-17), and John Jenrette (SC-6). So Republicans netted three seats from Abscam, effectively. One of those members elected against an Abscam-damaged member, Chris Smith (R, NJ-4), serves in the House to this day.

¹⁰³ Mikva and Nolan share an unusual similarity: Both served non-consecutive stints in the House and both served in different districts during those two stints. Mikva served in IL-2 from 1969-1973 and decided to run in IL-10 in 1972. He lost in 1972 but won in 1974, and he served until 1979, when President Carter appointed him to an appellate judgeship (he later served as President Clinton's White House counsel). Nolan represented MN-6 from 1975-1981, and then returned three decades later in a northeastern Minnesota seat covering the state's Iron Range, MN-8. He won three competitive elections in 2012, 2014, and 2016 before opting not to run again in 2018.

While Republicans did not win the House in 1980, the narrowing of the Democratic edge (and the Republican victory in the Senate) “dramatically raised House Republican hopes,” and even before that victory, some younger members like Gingrich had been agitating for the party to take a more aggressive stance against the Democrats. “An increasing number of Republicans embraced this critique over time, and the confrontationalist factor had prevailed by 1989,” Frances Lee wrote in her analysis of party competition in Congress.¹⁰⁴ That year was marked by Gingrich’s victory in the Republican caucus race to be minority whip, a position he narrowly won over Ed Madigan of Illinois. As political scientist Douglas Harris argued in an analysis of the vote, individual members took into account Gingrich’s confrontational style versus Madigan’s desire for accommodation and, by a slim 87-85 vote, backed Gingrich—and confrontation.¹⁰⁵

However, from the perspective of 1980 there was a ways to go before confrontational Republicans like Gingrich would take command of the Republican caucus, and throughout the 1980s, the Republicans found themselves stymied in their efforts to win a majority.

1982: The Democratic comeback

After cutting the Democratic margin substantially in the House in 1980, some Republicans openly dreamed of taking the majority in 1982. In June 1981, Republican National Committee Chairman Richard Richards “flatly promised a House takeover.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Lee, *Insecure Majorities*, 91.

¹⁰⁵ Harris, “Legislative Parties and Leadership Choice.”

¹⁰⁶ Busch, *Horses in Midstream*, 127.

Yet even a basic understanding of American political history would have suggested this would be nearly impossible: Even in the few instances in modern American political history when the president's party has gained seats in a midterm, the size of those gains has been in the single digits, whereas the Republicans needed to pick up 26 seats to win the House. What actually happened was more predictable based on history: It was the Democrats picking up 26 seats instead, as Reagan and the Republicans dealt with a deep recession, the usual White House midterm drag, and new House maps that largely helped Democrats.

The 1980 census congressional reapportionment continued to shift House seats from the Northeast and Midwest to the faster-growing West and South. Florida was the biggest gainer, adding four seats, followed by Texas adding three additional seats. New York was the biggest loser, with its delegation dropping five seats, while other Frost Belt states Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania lost two apiece. All in all, the Northeast lost nine House seats and the Midwest lost seven, while the Greater South gained eight and the West Coast and Interior West gained four apiece. Ultimately, a seat-by-seat comparison of seats gained and lost across the affected states netted the Democrats five seats. And then there was redistricting, a state-by-state process where Democrats benefited more than Republican. Journalist Michael Barone argued that redistricting "probably" netted the Democrats 15 seats in 1982 in states where they held sway,¹⁰⁷ and Alan Abramowitz found similarly.¹⁰⁸ A "grotesquely-shaped" and highly consequential gerrymander came in California, where Rep. Philip Burton's (D, CA-5) new map helped turn a 22-21

¹⁰⁷ Barone, *Our Country*, 625.

¹⁰⁸ Abramowitz, "Partisan Redistricting and the 1982 Congressional Elections," 770.

Democratic edge in the California delegation into a 28-17 advantage: The map drew two new Democratic districts and altered many others to Democrats' benefit.¹⁰⁹ A Democratic gerrymander in Texas also allowed the Democrats to sweep the state's three new seats, Meanwhile, GOP-controlled redistricting was both less common and less effective. Despite creating a "classic gerrymander,"¹¹⁰ Indiana Republicans took a 6-5 Democratic delegation and produced a map that, accounting for the loss of a seat, became a 5-5 split. It would take until 1994 for Indiana Republicans to eventually win a majority of the state's seats. Republicans also controlled redistricting in Pennsylvania, but it was the GOP who ended up losing the two seats necessitated by reapportionment. One of the seats the Democrats effectively held was a Western Pennsylvania seat held by Rep. Eugene Atkinson (PA-4), who switched parties in 1981 only to lose to a Democrat in a 1982 landslide. One other party-switcher, conservative Rep. Bob Stump (R, AZ-3), easily kept his seat. A couple other party-switchers would come in the next cycle: conservative Rep. Andy Ireland (R, FL-10) switched parties and easily won reelection in 1984, and Rep. Phil Gramm (R, TX-6) also switched and then won a Senate seat in 1984 (and was replaced by a Republican, Joe Barton, who went on to serve for nearly a quarter century before retiring in advance of the 2018 election).

Democrats benefited from the courts in Illinois, which had drawn a map that favored Republicans in the 1970s but picked a Democratic plan for the 1980s,¹¹¹ and also in Minnesota, where Democrats turned a 5-3 Republican edge into a 5-3 Democratic one. A bipartisan plan in New York ended up with the Democrats losing just two seats to the

¹⁰⁹ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1984*, 73-74.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Buchanan, "Classic Gerrymander by Indiana Republicans," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, Oct. 17, 1981, 2017-2022.

¹¹¹ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1984*, 326.

Republicans' three as the state reckoned with reapportionment. One of the few bright spots for Republicans across the nation came in Ohio, where a bipartisan redistricting plan did nothing to help Rep. Bob Shamansky (D, OH-12), who surprisingly defeated a long-time Republican incumbent in the Columbus-area district in 1980. But neither Democrats nor Republicans in state government got along with Shamansky, and the new redistricting plan helped then-state Sen. John Kasich (R) become the only Republican challenger to beat a Democratic incumbent in 1982.¹¹² Kasich would go on to become an influential House member, Ohio's governor from 2011-2019, and an unsuccessful presidential candidate in 2016. Redistricting did not have much effect on some of the Democratic gains, which in some cases represented an ebbing of the Reagan tide that flipped some lost 1980 districts back Democratic in 1982. So some Democratic losers in 1980, like Bob Carr (MI-6) and Peter Kostmayer (PA-8), regained their seats in the better conditions of 1982.

Combining their gains from reapportionment and redistricting suggests that the map changes, at the very least, accounted for a significant portion of their 1982 gains. There was also the state of the economy, which was very poor: The Federal Reserve's official history classifies the 1981-1982 downturn as the worst recession the nation suffered between the Great Depression and the more recent 2007-2009 recession.¹¹³ Given redistricting and recession, it seems likely that the Democratic gain was more than a little light. Midterm expert Andrew Busch noted that during two previous recession-aided midterms (1958 and 1974), the presidential party had lost almost double the 1982

¹¹² Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1984*, 935-936.

¹¹³ Tim Sablik, "Recession of 1981-82," Federal Reserve History, Nov. 22, 1983, https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/recession_of_1981_82.

loss (48 seats in each election). One factor, suggested by House expert Gary Jacobson, may be that Democratic challengers were not as well-funded as Republican challengers in 1982.¹¹⁴ Busch argued that a consensus formed about the results: One was that the results were not a broad repudiation of President Reagan but rather more of a course correction, and the second was that despite potentially disappointing gains, the character of the House had changed sufficiently enough that “the Democratic leadership had regained effective control of the House” from the Republican/conservative Democratic alliance.¹¹⁵

1984-1990: Years of stasis

The four elections following 1982 were years of relative tranquility in the partisan makeup of the House. The Republicans regained some but not all of their losses in 1984, netting 16 seats in the midst of Reagan’s landslide reelection. The following three elections saw Democrats net five seats in 1986, two in 1988, and eight in 1990. So over the course of four elections, the net change in the House was just a one-seat Republican gain.

Contributing to the low levels of net partisan change were largely stable maps throughout the decade after 1982, when every state but Maine and Montana redistricted. (The M&M laggards, two lightly-populated states with just two districts apiece, would redistrict to little fanfare in 1984.) California Democrats also tweaked its gerrymander after voters threw out the old “Burtonmander,” although the changes were minor (outgoing Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown signed the new map into law right before departing). The only change in California was a single GOP gain in 1984: Bob Dornan

¹¹⁴ Jacobson and Carson, *Politics of Congressional Elections*, 200.

¹¹⁵ Busch, *Horses in Midstream*, 129-130.

(R), a former House member and talk show host who had unsuccessfully run for the Senate in 1982 instead of running for reelection in a Los Angeles County seat, moved to an Orange County district and beat Rep. Jerry Patterson (D, CA-38). “B-1 Bob” Dornan, nicknamed as such for his outspoken advocacy of the B-1 bomber project, won 53%-45% in a district the Californian Reagan carried 69%-30%. Burton died in 1983 and was replaced by his wife, Sala, in a special election for his San Francisco seat. Four years later, she was replaced by future Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi—but Burton’s gerrymander effectively lived on throughout the remainder of the decade.

More helpful to Republicans than the slightly-adjusted Golden State map was a new map in Texas forced by a court ruling. Republicans would gain five seats in Texas in 1984, aided by Reagan’s sweep and the new lines, but also by the fact that Republicans were “finally getting people to vote for their candidates below the statewide level.”¹¹⁶ After 1984, the Texas delegation was 17-10 Democratic. Republicans had reached double digits there for the first time in history. They would fall back in a few places over the rest of the decade, but they had already come a long way since 1976, when they held just two of the 24 seats in the Lone Star State. Texas would eventually become one of the crucial power centers of the GOP House delegation, and two of the Texans first elected in 1984—Dick Armey (R, TX-26) and Tom DeLay (R, TX-22) —would both later serve as House majority leader. A court-ordered map in New Jersey that replaced a previous Democratic gerrymander directly led to the defeat of Rep. Joseph Minish (D, NJ-11), a long-serving but unaccomplished member.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1986*, 1281.

¹¹⁷ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1986*, 862.

Additionally, Republicans seemed to benefit from delayed effects of previous redistricting. In other words, they gained some seats in 1984 that they arguably could have or should have won in 1982. For instance, a Republican-drawn map in Arizona that failed to deliver a new seat to the party in 1982 performed better in 1984, giving the Republicans a delayed pickup two years earlier. A lagging redistricting effect probably helped the Republicans pick up a seat in Maryland, and in North Carolina, a court-modified House map made to comply with the federal Voting Rights Act “was expected to benefit the Republicans” in 1982¹¹⁸ but Democrats ended up netting two seats instead. Congress had modified the VRA in 1982 in such a way that it would be “read as requiring states to create districts with black and Hispanic majorities wherever possible,”¹¹⁹ although a big federal push for majority-minority districts would not come until the 1990 redistricting cycle. Republicans returned fire in 1984 in the Tar Heel State, picking up three seats as six races overall were decided by two points or less (Republicans won four of the six). So redistricting, both conducted before and after 1982, helped the Republicans gain some ground in 1984, but these gains were tenuous.

The House now stood at 253-182, and the Republicans didn’t have realistic prospects for winning the majority in 1986 given that Reagan was still in the White House, meaning that the Democrats continued to benefit from the usual out-party midterm pattern.

¹¹⁸ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1984*, 868.

¹¹⁹ Robert Pear, “The 1992 Campaign: Congressional Districts; Redistricting Expected to Bring Surge in Minority Lawmakers,” *New York Times*, Aug. 3, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/03/us/1992-campaign-congressional-districts-redistricting-expected-bring-surge.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

The Democrats did end up winning the Senate in 1986, capturing the Upper Chamber after the Republicans had won it in 1980, but there wasn't much of an overall wave. The 1981-1982 recession had long passed and Reagan was popular; the Iran-Contra scandal that would tarnish the final two years of his presidency broke immediately after the midterm, and thus it had no effect on that election. The Democrats picked up a very modest five seats in the House, few of which were notable. A district in Mississippi that had been drawn to elect an African American to satisfy the VRA failed to do so in both 1982 and 1984, but in 1986, attorney Mike Espy, an African-American Democrat, won the seat. Additionally, another VRA district in Atlanta elected civil rights activist John Lewis (D, GA-5) in 1986 as well after a white Democrat, Wyche Fowler, had previously held the seat (Fowler won a Senate race). The rise of VRA districts designed to elect minority candidates in the South would play a major role in the battle for the House in the 1990s. Also in the South, Democrats won back two of three seats they had lost in North Carolina, so the map designed to favor the GOP didn't deliver in 1986. In Oklahoma, James Inhofe (R), a future U.S. senator, won the Tulsa-based OK-1 after Rep. James Jones (D) ran for Senate (Jones had won a close reelection in 1984 as Reagan was carrying the district by 41 points). Republicans had held a version of OK-1 prior to Jones' initial victory there in 1972, and they have held that district ever since.

Two years later, as George H.W. Bush was winning a third straight Republican term in the White House, there also was little change in the U.S. House, as Democrats netted two seats.

As part of that year's small seat exchange, Republicans netted two seats in Florida as they captured an open seat and also saw a political newcomer, Craig James (R), topple

a 20-year incumbent saddled with ethical problems, Rep. Bill Chappell (D, FL-4). Early in Bush's presidency, state Sen. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R) would win a special election following the death of long-time Rep. Claude Pepper (D, FL-18) for a Miami-based seat with a heavy Cuban population. Not only would Ros-Lehtinen hold a version of the seat for nearly three decades—she retired ahead of the 2018 election, when her seat flipped to the Democrats—but her victory, plus the two seats the GOP netted in 1988, gave Republicans a majority of Florida's House seats, which they have held continuously since as the growing state has increased the size of its delegation.

Importantly for House Republicans, even as they continued to labor in the minority, they finished the eight years of Reagan's presidency having suffered little net loss over the course of his presidency. Starting from the 1980 election—one where the Republicans, again, netted 34 seats—they only lost a net of 17 seats from Reagan's inauguration through Bush's inauguration. That is the lowest loss suffered by any presidential party over the course of all the post-World War II two-term presidencies, and significantly lower than the average (40 seats) loss inflicted on the eight postwar administrations (this analysis counts as a single administration the John F. Kennedy/Lyndon B. Johnson presidencies from 1961-1969 and the Richard Nixon/Gerald Ford presidencies from 1969-1977).¹²⁰ In other words, the Republicans more than held their own in the House during the Reagan presidency given the usual toll holding the White House has on down-ballot fortunes. Going even deeper, the Republicans started the Bush presidency with slightly more state legislative seats (six) than they had won

¹²⁰ Larry J. Sabato, Kyle Kondik, and Geoffrey Skelley, "16 for '16: Bite-sized Observations on a Wild Election," *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, Nov. 17, 2016, <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/16-for-16/>.

nationally in 1980. That doesn't seem all that impressive when one considers that there are more than 7,000 state legislative seats spread across the country; however, the average postwar two-term presidency saw the presidential party lose 508 seats from the beginning to the end of the administration. That Democrats did not make up much ground in the House during an eight-year presidential administration, and didn't make up any in state legislative races, was something of a historical oddity and perhaps suggestive of growing Republican strength heading into the 1990s.

The relative stasis in the House continued in 1990, when Democrats made another relatively minor gain despite not holding the presidency (eight seats, after their small five-seat gain in 1986).

Indiana Republicans, who had tried to draw themselves a favorable map in advance of the 1982 election, saw Democrats net two seats in the Hoosier State, so the party on what seemed like the wrong end of a gerrymander finished the decade holding eight of Indiana's 10 seats. Republican growth in the South, meanwhile, continued sluggishly: Democrats still held the majority of the seats in 12 of the 14 states of the Greater South (the Old Confederacy plus Kentucky, Oklahoma, and West Virginia). The exceptions were the aforementioned Florida delegation (narrowly controlled by Republicans) and Louisiana (a four-to-four split).

1992: Racial Redistricting and Turnover Boost Republicans

The ongoing shift in population growth from north and east to south and west was confirmed once again in the 1990 census, with New York losing another three seats and big industrial states Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania losing two apiece.

Gaining representation was California, which added seven seats, as well as Florida (four) and Texas (three). The population changes along with an improved redistricting picture nationally—the Republicans were still at a national disadvantage against the Democrats, but they were in better shape than they had been in post-1980 redistricting thanks in part to some success in 1990’s gubernatorial races¹²¹—meant that Democrats seemed in 1992 “doomed to lose one to two dozen seats.”¹²² But the Democrats came out roughly even in the exchange of seats between the states losing seats and those gaining, in part because the Democrats still controlled the levers of redistricting power in some key states, like Texas, where the *Almanac of American Politics* awarded Democrats the decade’s “Phil Burton Award” for their pro-Democratic gerrymander.¹²³ Democrats ended up winning all three of the new Texas seats and only losing one of their other seats, giving them 21 of 30 seats in a state that was clearly trending Republican; it had voted by double-digit margins for Reagan in 1980 and 1984 and native son Bush in 1988 and would resist Bill Clinton (D) in both 1992 and 1996 despite the former Arkansas governor winning two clear victories nationally those years.

Clinton’s win over President George H.W. Bush in 1992, which was complicated by businessman Ross Perot’s strong showing as an independent (he won almost 19% of the national popular vote, although he won no electoral votes), may have also helped Democrats outperform House expectations in 1992. For instance, the writers of the *Almanac* argued, Bush’s “collapse” on the West Coast “helped Democrats win about nine

¹²¹ Reid Wilson, “Pioneer of modern redistricting dies at 75,” *The Hill*, Aug. 18, 2018, <http://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/402489-pioneer-of-modern-redistricting-dies-at-75>.

¹²² Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics* 1994, xl.

¹²³ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics* 1994, 1209.

districts there that Republicans expected to take.”¹²⁴ All told, Republicans netted nine seats; not bad when one considers that they were losing the White House for the first time in a dozen years at the same time.

The big story in redistricting in 1992 was the Bush administration’s push to create majority-minority districts based on the Voting Rights Act. There was a political impetus here: Republicans had come to believe that creating new majority-minority districts would create heavily Democratic districts, leaving surrounding districts more Republican.¹²⁵ The result was the creation of 15 new majority African-American districts and 10 new Hispanic majority districts after the 1990 round of redistricting.¹²⁶ But there were political costs to Democrats in the new maps, some of which would become apparent in the 1992 elections. For instance, in Florida, a new majority-black district connecting Jacksonville to Orlando allowed state Rep. Corrine Brown (D) to win election to the House. But the removal of black voters from Jacksonville-area Rep. Charles Bennett’s (D, FL-4) district contributed to his decision to retire, opening a seat that Jacksonville City Council President Tillie Fowler (R) won.¹²⁷ In Alabama, Rep. Ben Erdreich’s (D, AL-6) district went from 37% black to 9% black as a new majority-black district was created elsewhere in the state. The district thus became more Republican, and Erdreich lost to Spencer Bachus (R).¹²⁸ In Georgia, Democrats constrained by the VRA-district push and population growth in heavily Republican Atlanta suburbs meant there was no way for them to draw a map that would only elect one Republican (Gingrich, the

¹²⁴ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1994*, xl.

¹²⁵ Cunningham, *Maximization, Whatever the Cost*, 6.

¹²⁶ Lublin, *The Paradox of Representation*, 23.

¹²⁷ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1994*, 285.

¹²⁸ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1994*, 21.

future House speaker). But Democrats tried to draw the map in such a way that Gingrich would lose; not only did he run in a different district and win, but Republicans ended up winning four of the state's 11 seats.¹²⁹

Two other factors are worth noting in 1992. The first is that the year featured a lot of turnover; just 368 of the 435 districts featured an incumbent running for reelection, the lowest total of the post-World War II era.¹³⁰ The reasons for the high number of open seats are numerous: 1992 was a redistricting year, which often creates more turnover and sometimes leads to members running against members in the same district. The House also was rocked by the House Banking Scandal, in which “hundreds of members had written thousands of overdrafts on checking accounts with the House bank,” which had covered the checks and thus issued “in effect, interest-free loans to members with negative balances.”¹³¹ According to political scientists Michael Dimock and Gary Jacobson, the scandal “reduced the vote for House incumbents by about five percentage points” and likely contributed to at least some incumbent losses.¹³² As a result of all the turnover, 110 new members of the House were elected in 1992.¹³³

The other factor worth noting is that more than half of the nation's districts were drawn either in a bipartisan way by state governments under divided party control, or in a nonpartisan way, like a commission in Washington state that drew a highly competitive map where Democrats captured eight of the state's nine seats in 1992.¹³⁴ So while

¹²⁹ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1994*, 331.

¹³⁰ Kyle Kondik, “Open Season in the House,” *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, Jan. 18, 2018, <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/open-season-in-the-house/>.

¹³¹ Dimock and Jacobson, “Checks and Choices,” 1143.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Lyons and Galderisi, “Incumbency, Reapportionment, and U. S. House Redistricting,” 864.

Republicans did not initially make huge strides as the decade's race for the House began, they were set up better to make gains if the political environment cooperated as Clinton's presidency began. As it turned out, the environment *did* cooperate.

1994: The Fall of the Democrats

A confluence of factors conspired to make the Democratic House majority highly vulnerable in 1994.

For starters, the Democrats now held the White House again for just the second time since the end of Lyndon Johnson's presidency. They had only had to deal with a single midterm election while they controlled the White House over the course of a quarter-century—1978, when they avoided major losses even as the election augured poorly for liberalism's near-term future. The Republicans, meanwhile, had to defend their House caucus in five such midterms over the same time period. As noted above, House experts Gary Jacobson and Thomas Mann argued in the late 1980s about how the Democratic House majority might be vulnerable the next time Democrats held the White House during a midterm election.

Republicans, now holding no levers of power in Washington, made the determination that they would not work with Democrats. Gingrich, who had become minority whip in the close 1989 caucus election, and other Republican leaders decided that cooperating with the Democratic House majority in the past “was not helpful for majority making.”¹³⁵ Republicans, therefore, provided no votes for a budget bill that included tax increases in Clinton's first year. Democrats narrowly passed the budget

¹³⁵ Lee, *Insecure Majorities*, 105.

through the House, with first-term Rep. Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky (D, PA-13) providing a decisive vote. As Margolies-Mezvinsky cast her vote, Republicans chanted “Bye-bye Marjorie” on the House floor (and she would in fact lose in 1994). A contributor to Bush’s 1992 loss arguably was his broken pledge not to raise taxes, and his reversal “had torn [Bush’s] party apart” in 1990, political analyst Steve Kornacki argued in his history of partisan conflict in the 1990s. This time, Republicans held their ground against a tax bill and anticipated political gains from it.¹³⁶ Clinton and the Democrats also tried, and failed, to substantially increase health insurance coverage. “The health-care fiasco only added fuel to the Republican contention that the institution had been corrupted by continuous Democratic rule for the past forty years,” wrote official House historian Robert Remini, who also noted the House Bank affair and other scandals, including one that ensnared powerful Democratic House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D, IL-5).¹³⁷ Rostenkowski, indicted on embezzlement and fraud charges, lost his committee chairmanship and, later, his 1994 reelection bid in his otherwise very Democratic-leaning district. Meanwhile, Clinton’s approval rating sank to the low-to-mid 40s during the months leading up to the election.¹³⁸

The party polarization and straight-ticket voting that would come to be so prevalent in the 21st century began to show itself, subtly, in 1992. A large number of House districts, 100, still voted for different parties for president and House. But that was actually the lowest number of crossover House districts since 1952, and the number would dwindle over time. In the aftermath of 1992, the *Almanac of American Politics*

¹³⁶ Kornacki, *Red and the Blue*, 244-245.

¹³⁷ Remini, *The House*, 480-481.

¹³⁸ “How Trump Compares With Past Presidents: Bill Clinton,” FiveThirtyEight, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>.

picked up on an emerging trend of the nationalization of politics and argued that House Democratic candidates in 1992 had campaigned on many of the same issues that Clinton had that year, instead of focusing on “the sort of local and micro-issues which House members of both parties have used to help them weather difficult years for their parties in marginal districts.”¹³⁹ This trend on the Democratic side in 1992 dovetailed with what Kornacki described as an overarching Gingrich strategy: “finding a way to nationalize congressional elections” against Democrats, who had benefited from the power of incumbency and a separation between perceptions of the national party and perceptions of individual Democratic House members.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Republican self-identification among southern white voters finally surpassed Democratic self-identification among southern whites in the early 1990s, just as racial redistricting with the goal of creating majority-minority districts was reshaping the southern congressional map, with heavily Democratic black voters being packed together in districts designed to elect black Democrats. That left southern white Democrats in the position of having to defend whiter and more Republican districts than what they were used to, just as white southerners were becoming less likely to identify as Democrats.

For Democrats, all of this was a toxic brew. And the GOP hammer fell hard.

Republicans smashed Democrats in most regions of the country, netting 54 seats. Some of their biggest net gains came in southern states where Democrats had held on in 1992 despite the constraints of the VRA, but those maps could not withstand the Republican wave in 1994. Republicans netted three seats in Georgia and four in North

¹³⁹ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1994*, xl.

¹⁴⁰ Kornacki, *Red and the Blue*, 274.

Carolina, winning control of those states' House delegations for the first time in post-Reconstruction history. Republicans also netted two seats apiece in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Texas, although the VRA wasn't really a factor in those losses. A Democratic gerrymander in Oklahoma retained the state's four-to-two Democratic House delegation in 1992, but in 1994 it fell apart as the GOP netted three seats (all of which were open).

All told, the Republicans netted 21 seats in the Greater South, taking a slim majority (73-67) of the seats in the region for the first time in modern history.

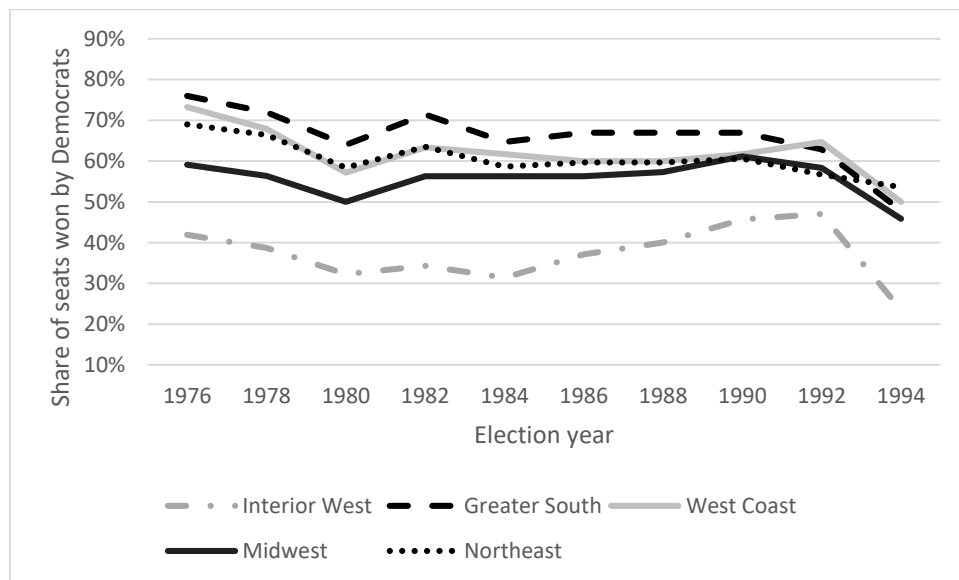
But the gains were not limited to the South. Surveying the wreckage of the Democrats' lost majority, R.W. Apple, Jr. of the *New York Times* observed that the Republican gains "were centered mainly on suburban and small-town areas that are arguably naturally Republican, and had been held by Democrats mainly through superior skills."¹⁴¹ Therein lied the logic of the Gingrich nationalization strategy, and also the precarious position in which Democrats found themselves in a time of high House turnover. Republicans won 22 previously Democratic open seats, and they beat another 11 first-term Democratic incumbents, which means that a clear majority of their gains came in seats where the power of incumbency was either absent or not deeply rooted.

The competitive Washington state map, which had elected an eight-to-one Democratic delegation in 1992, turned around and gave the Republicans a net gain of five seats in 1994. One of the losers, in a right-of-center Eastern Washington district, was House Speaker Tom Foley (D, WA-5), the first sitting speaker to lose in the post-Civil

¹⁴¹ R.W. Apple, Jr., "The 1994 Elections: Congress – NEWS ANALYSIS How Lasting a Majority? Despite Sweeping Gains for Republicans, History Suggests the Power is Temporary," *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/10/us/1994-elections-congress-analysis-lasting-majority-despite-sweeping-gains-for.html?searchResultPosition=6>.

War era. Republicans also netted three seats in California and two in Arizona, making in 1994 some of the gains many expected them to make in 1992. They netted 12 in the competitive Midwest, retaking the majority in that region's combined delegation. In Indiana, Republicans finally retook the state's delegation, netting three seats and winning a six-to-four advantage on a map that hadn't changed much since their gerrymander way back in 1982. The Republicans' other big Midwestern gains came in Ohio, where they netted four seats. The one region where Republicans hardly picked up any ground was the Northeast, where they only netted three seats. The shifts in Democratic control over the course of the 1976-1994 time period are shown in figure 3. Note the regional confluence outside of the more Republican Interior West: While the southern results represented a breakthrough for Republicans, they nonetheless built their majority in a regionally broad-based way.

Figure 3: Regional share of House seats won by Democrats, 1976-1994



Source: Compiled by author.

Still, what may not have been completely clear at the time but is certainly clear now is that the Republicans had hardly maximized their gains in the South. The Democratic gerrymander was still in place in Texas, giving them a 19-11 majority there even after the GOP picked up two seats. In conservative states like Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, Democrats retained House delegation majorities, but they wouldn't last.

Conclusion

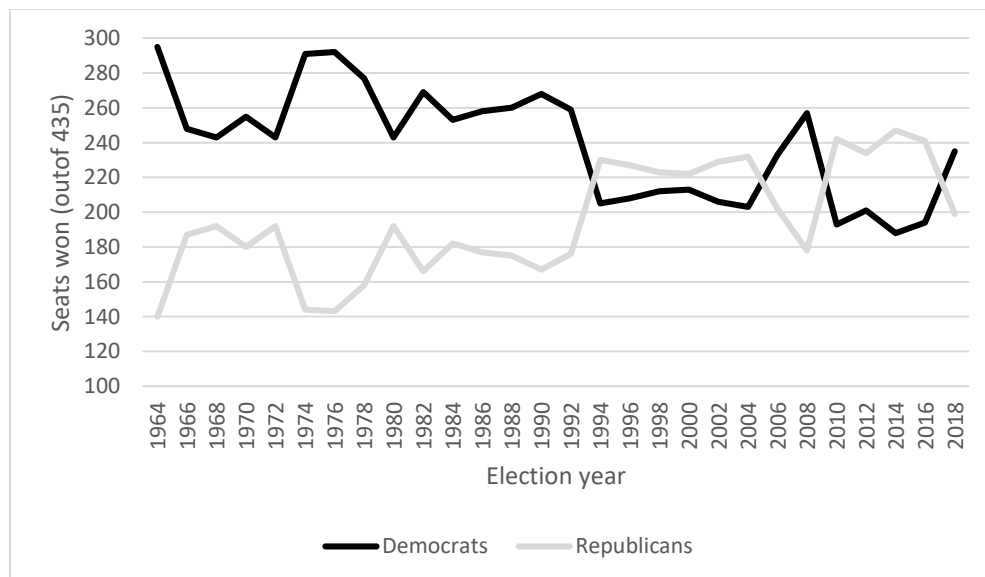
The late 1970s and 1980s were largely a time of frustration for Republicans in their efforts to win the House. Holding the White House proved to be something of a burden for Republicans, preventing them from making the House gains that midterm elections often produce for the party that does not hold the White House. That said, Democrats found themselves unable to maintain their huge majorities of 1974 and 1976, when they elected about two-thirds of the entire House each time, and they failed to build majorities large enough to put the House out of reach for Republicans when they had their own midterm opportunities, particularly in 1986 and 1990. The confluence of a high number of open and vulnerable seats, racial redistricting and realignment in the South, and an unpopular presidential administration trying to defend its majority in a midterm helped Republicans break the Democratic hammerlock on the House in 1994.

Chapter 3: The House from 1996 to Present:

A Persistent but not Unassailable Republican Edge

The election of 1994 represents a dividing line between two eras in the House. In the 63 years prior to that election, the Democrats would hold the majority for 59 years. In the 26 years following 1994—through the upcoming 2020 election—Republicans would hold the majority for 20 years. Figure 4 shows the partisan breakdown in the House from 1964-2018: Note the shift in 1994 from a long era of Democratic control to a time where Republicans have been likelier to hold the majority. But as of this writing, the Democrats control the House, holding a 235-199 majority after netting 41 seats in the 2018 election.

Figure 4: Partisan strength in the House, 1964-2018



Source: Compiled by author.

That said, the general trend over the past quarter century has been Republican control of the House.

Democrats have only won majorities in three national elections that broke decisively in their favor: The anti-George W. Bush/anti-Iraq War midterm of 2006, the anti-Donald Trump midterm of 2018 (when Democrats flipped the House from Republican control each time), and the general election victory of Barack Obama in 2008 (when they held the House). Republicans would win the House majority in every other election from 1996-2018; that includes in years where the national House vote was very narrowly divided (1996, 1998, and 2000) and even when the Democrats won slightly more House votes than Republicans (2012).

It may very well be that after decades of a dominating Democratic advantage in the House, there is now a persistent Republican edge: That's not to say that Democrats cannot win the majority from time to time—clearly, they can—but rather that one might expect a closely divided national battle for the House to break in the direction of the Republicans more often than the Democrats.

It's important to note that whatever advantages the Republicans currently hold in the U.S. House of Representatives, they pale in comparison to the ones Democrats held for much of the 20th century. From 1930 through 1992, the average number of seats won by Democrats was 259, 41 seats higher than the majority threshold (218 seats).¹⁴² From 1994 through 2018, the number of seats won by the Republicans in each election was just 223 seats, or just five seats above the 218-seat threshold.

¹⁴² Technically, Republicans very narrowly won the House majority in the 1930 midterm, but by the time the House met for its first session in December 1931, Democrats had captured a small edge thanks to a series of special election victories throughout 1931. For the purposes of this calculation average, we are counting the November 1930 results.

A review of recent literature on the House makes clear some of the reasons for why Republicans may have an edge in the House: Republicans appear to have benefited from recent trends in House district line-drawing over the past few decades, both because of the racial redistricting described in the previous chapter and also because of increasing GOP control of the state-level levers of redistricting. That control was unusually lopsided in the post-2010 redistricting cycle. Beyond that, there are geographic advantages that Republicans enjoy that might benefit them even if redistricting was handled, hypothetically, in a way in which maximizing partisan Republican advantage was not the goal.

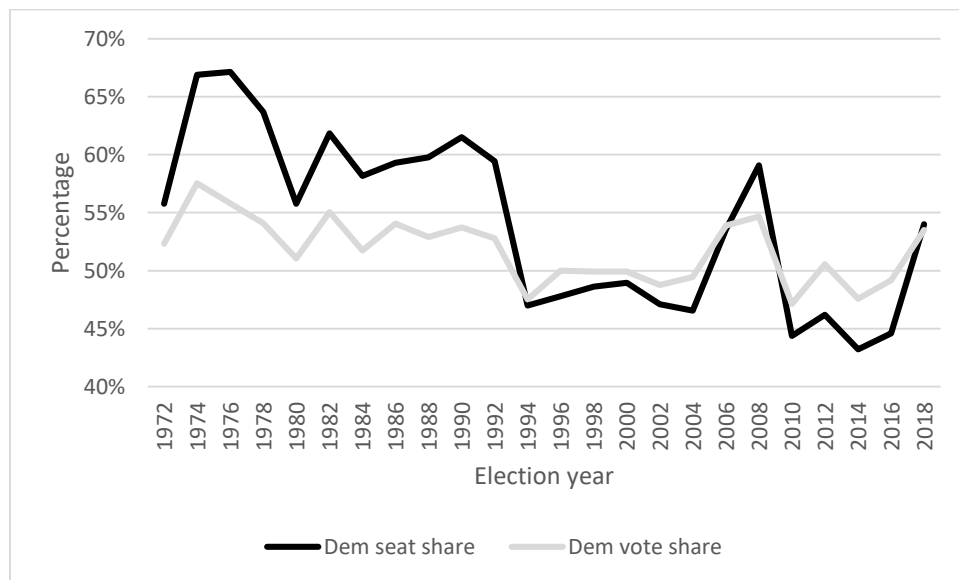
Republicans also arguably have benefited more than Democrats from two big-picture trends in American politics: The declining power of incumbency, and the increasing nationalization of election results, such that ticket-splitting—voters in a given congressional district picking one party for president and the other in their local House race—has become less common.

Literature review: Evidence for a persistent Republican House edge

There is abundant evidence that the Republicans have enjoyed something of a structural advantage in the House over the last quarter century. There is of course the obvious: From 1995 to 2019, the Republicans held the majority 80% of the time while Democrats have only held it 20% of the time. But beyond that, Republicans may be advantaged in that they may expect to win more than 50% of the seats when they win 50% of the national House vote. That used to be true for Democrats but now is not.

House scholar Theodore Arrington found that in both the 1970s and 1980s, Democrats could have expected to win 53.3% and 56.7% of the total seats if they won 50% of the House vote (Arrington is able to compare results over time by estimating the vote totals in unopposed districts—the number of unopposed districts in a given year can have an impact on the raw national House votes). Arrington’s adjusted House popular vote and seat share is displayed in figure 5.

Figure 5: Democratic share of the adjusted House popular vote compared to share of seats won, 1972-2018



Source: Data calculated and provided by Theodore S. Arrington.

However, by the 1990s, Arrington found that this Democratic advantage had eroded to the point where, during that decade, Democrats could only expect to win 50.3% of the seats with 50% of the vote, meaning that there wasn’t much partisan bias one way or the other in the House that decade. In the 2000s and 2010s, a Republican advantage

appeared, such that Democrats could only expect to win 48.8% and 46.6% of the seats, respectively, with 50% of the vote.¹⁴³

Redistricting analysts Nicholas Stephanopoulos and Eric McGhee created what they call the “efficiency gap” to determine whether congressional maps benefited one party or the other over the last several decades. In a nutshell, an efficiency gap in favor of one side means that party can “claim more seats, relative to a zero-gap plan, without claiming more votes.”¹⁴⁴ Their findings, contra to Arrington, found that neither party had much of an advantage in the 1970s, but they agreed with Arrington in finding an edge for Democrats in the 1980s. They then showed an increasing GOP edge in the 1990s to the 2000 and to the 2010s.¹⁴⁵ Again, they differ with Arrington in some ways, but the overall takeaway is the same: As recently as the 1980s, the Democrats seemed to hold an advantage on the national House map, but now the Republicans clearly do.

Some of this probably has to do with the creation of majority-minority districts, covered at length in the last chapter. The Justice Department’s push for such districts, which many experts believe helped Republicans pick up House seats in both 1992 and 1994, led to what legal scholar Samuel Issacharoff described as a “tortuous”¹⁴⁶ series of court decisions in the 1990s and early 2000s as the U.S. Supreme Court agonized over what to do about using race as a motivation to create strong majority-minority districts. Much of the legal debate centered around North Carolina’s Twelfth Congressional

¹⁴³ Theodore S. Arrington, “The Seats/Votes Relationship in the U.S. House 1972-2018,” *Sabato’s Crystal Ball*, Jan. 31, 2019, <http://crystalball.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/the-seats-votes-relationship-in-the-u-s-house-1972-2018/>.

¹⁴⁴ Stephanopoulos and McGhee, “Partisan Gerrymandering and the Efficiency Gap,” 852.

¹⁴⁵ Stephanopoulos and McGhee, “Partisan Gerrymandering and the Efficiency Gap,” 871.

¹⁴⁶ Issacharoff, “Gerrymandering and Political Cartels,” 634.

District, which was drawn as a majority African-American district and is “the most litigated district in the country since the 1990s”¹⁴⁷ The upshot of these cases, concluding with *Easley v. Cromartie* in 2001, was that “a legislature is now free to seek any objective in redistricting, so long as it eschews any express commitment to providing representation to racial minorities,” according to Issacharoff.¹⁴⁸ The snake-like NC-12 was only finally unraveled as part of a 2016 Republican gerrymander forced by a racial redistricting court order.

In the process of this string of cases, several districts across many states drawn after the 1990 census as racial gerrymanders were thrown out and redrawn with smaller percentages of the minority group in question. However, political scientist Christian Grose found that all of the African-American members who ran for reelection in the same district with reduced African-American populations ended up winning reelection anyway (although one, Cleo Fields of Louisiana, opted not to run after his district’s black population was reduced on two separate occasions.)¹⁴⁹ The likeliest explanations for their victories were that these districts retained large African-American voting blocs (and in some instances remained majority minority), as Grose demonstrates,¹⁵⁰ and also that the power of incumbency helped them. Political scientists D. Stephen Voss and David Lublin provide evidence for both of these explanations in an analysis of the 1996 elections involving some African-American incumbents whose districts were redrawn in response to Supreme Court intervention.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Cohen and Barnes, *Almanac of American Politics 2018*, 1429.

¹⁴⁸ Issacharoff, “Gerrymandering and Political Cartels,” 636.

¹⁴⁹ Grose, *Congress in Black and White*, 46.

¹⁵⁰ Grose, *Congress in Black and White*, 45.

¹⁵¹ Voss and Lublin, “Black Incumbents, White Districts.”

More recently, Michael Li and Laura Royden of the liberal Brennan Center for Justice found that “majority-minority districts do not result in maps that unfairly favor either party” and that the creation of such districts “could, in fact, help reduce the high partisan bias in some of this decade’s maps.”¹⁵²

Speaking of “high partisan bias,” or the allegation thereof on the congressional maps drawn following the 2010 census, let’s turn to the current state of partisan redistricting. If redistricting based on race was perhaps the primary focus of House districting literature in the 1990s and early 2000s, partisan redistricting is arguably the chief focus now.

Many scholars question the effectiveness of redistricting as a partisan weapon. Mark Rush, writing in 1993, argued that the effect of partisan redistricting can be hard to measure. A major reason for this is that, unlike with race, which is a classification a person carries for life, partisanship is not necessarily permanent, Rush argues. His analysis of voting behavior “undermines the assumption of consistent partisan behavior and thereby strikes at a fundamental assumption...that partisan constituencies—voting blocs—can be identified clearly, accurately, and easily.”¹⁵³

Writing around the same time, political scientists Andrew Gelman and Gary King made a positive argument for gerrymandering, or at least for redistricting: “Gerrymandering biases electoral systems in favor of the party that controls the redistricting as compared to what would have happened if the other party controlled it,

¹⁵² Michael Li and Laura Royden, “Minority Representation: No Conflict with Fair Maps,” Brennan Center for Justice, Sept. 5, 2017, <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/minority-representation-fair-maps>.

¹⁵³ Rush, *Does Redistricting Make a Difference?* 9.

but any type of redistricting reduces partisan bias as compared to an electoral system without redistricting.”¹⁵⁴

Even in an era defined by partisan polarization, voting preferences can and do swing wildly, particularly if a big surge for one party in the presidential contest is followed by a counter-surge by the other party in the following midterm. That can cause significant changes in the performance of House candidates. Over the last three midterms prior to 2018 (2006, 2010, and 2014), a study by the author of average U.S. House district-level results found that “the presidential party’s share of the two-party vote declined by 5.3 percentage points in these three midterms from the previous cycle’s results.”¹⁵⁵ This change in partisan swing can undo the designs of even the most skilled partisan mapmakers, turning a gerrymander into what political scientists Bernard Grofman and Thomas Brunell called the “dummymander.” That is a “gerrymander by one party that, over the course of the decade, benefits the other party.”¹⁵⁶ That dummymanders sometimes occur—Grofman and Brunell found several examples in the South after the 1990 and 2000 round of redistricting—lends credence to Rush’s suggestion that a lack of “well-ordered and consistent voter preferences”¹⁵⁷ limits the power of partisan redistricting.

Political scientist Nicholas Seabrook found that there are several legal and geographic constraints on redistricting and that partisan redistricting can actually increase

¹⁵⁴ Gelman and King, “Enhancing Democracy Through Legislative Redistricting,” 541.

¹⁵⁵ Kyle Kondik, “For House Republicans, Past Performance is No Guarantee of Future Results.” *Sabato’s Crystal Ball*, July 20, 2017, <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/for-house-republicans-past-performance-is-no-guarantee-of-future-results/>.

¹⁵⁶ Grofman and Brunell, “The Art of the Dummymander,” 184.

¹⁵⁷ Rush, *Does Redistricting Make a Difference?* 141-142.

competition in the long term, as opposed to bipartisan plans, where “both parties have incentives to reduce competitiveness, resulting in redistricting plans that carve out safe districts for incumbents of both political stripes.”¹⁵⁸ He is not alone in this finding; for instance, House expert Thomas Mann found that “a commission whose membership is evenly divided between the parties... is naturally drawn toward bipartisan compromise, which usually works to the advantage of incumbents and to the detriment of competition.”¹⁵⁹ So to some scholars, specifically Seabrook, a potential cure for partisan redistricting—redistricting processes that are bipartisan—may be worse than the disease itself.

Political scientists Anthony McGann, Charles Anthony Smith, Michael Latner, and Alex Keena found that “partisan bias increased sharply in the 2010 districting round,”¹⁶⁰ and that the bias toward the Republicans was so large that the post-2010 GOP-dominated redistricting “has effectively determined control of the House of Representatives for a decade.”¹⁶¹ (The specifics of the GOP’s post-2010 redistricting control are addressed in the history of the era that follows). The contention that the Democrats might have been shut out of winning the House until the next round of redistricting after the 2020 census was based in part on the fact that after the 2010 redistricting in the 2012 House election, Democrats won more House votes nationally than the Republicans, but only captured 201 seats, 17 short of the 218 required for a majority. Sam Wang, a neuroscientist and electoral analyst, argued that Democrats would have needed to win the national House vote by seven points to win House control in

¹⁵⁸ Seabrook, *Drawing the Lines*, 121.

¹⁵⁹ Mann, “Redistricting Reform,” 108.

¹⁶⁰ McGann, et. al., *Gerrymandering in America*, 225.

¹⁶¹ McGann, et. al., *Gerrymandering in America*, 18.

2012, and he attributed the Democratic roadblock to redistricting: “Politicians, especially Republicans facing demographic and ideological changes in the electorate, use redistricting to cling to power.”¹⁶²

In any event, the suggestion that the post-2010 GOP gerrymanders made the House unwinnable for Democrats for the entirety of the following decade ended up being wrong, as Democrats won it fairly comfortably in 2018. But just because Democrats were capable of winning the House in 2018 does not mean that the House does not have a Republican bias at this juncture of history.

There’s one other wrinkle that may hurt the Democrats in the House, according to political scientist Jonathan Rodden. The Democrats have increasingly become an urban party, with the Republicans holding more rural areas, and the Democrats are hurt because “[i]n many US states, Democrats are now concentrated in cities in such a way that even when districts are drawn without regard for partisanship, their seat share will fall well short of their vote share.”¹⁶³ There is something compelling about this hypothesis that is borne out in district-level presidential results: in the 2016 presidential election, Democrat Hillary Clinton received 70% or more of the vote in 62 House districts, while Republican Donald Trump won 70% or more in just 23. Unsurprisingly, many of the Clinton-won districts are majority-minority districts, demonstrating how the creation of such districts can create very strongly Democratic seats given that nonwhite voters are such a reliably

¹⁶² Sam Wang, “The Great Gerrymander of 2012,” *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/03/opinion/sunday/the-great-gerrymander-of-2012.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

¹⁶³ Rodden, *Why Cities Lose*, 3.

Democratic voting bloc (Clinton carried about three-quarters of the votes cast by nonwhite voters in 2016, according to exit polls).¹⁶⁴

McGann et. al. take issue with the argument about geographic concentration, conceding that while the “urban concentration of the Democratic vote may make the drawing of pro-Republican partisan gerrymanders easier,” they are not inevitable because the “bias of district plans, even in the most urbanized states, is a matter of political choice.”¹⁶⁵

Beyond gerrymandering, there is the growing nationalization of politics. Political scientists Alan Abramowitz and Steven Webster have noted that “Recent elections in the United States have been characterized by the highest levels of party loyalty and straight-ticket voting since the American National Election Studies first began measuring party identification in 1952” and that there is “a growing connection between the results of presidential elections and the results of House, Senate and even state legislative elections.”¹⁶⁶ Following the 2018 election, Abramowitz also reiterated his findings that House elections were becoming more nationalized and that ideological moderation was no longer much of an electoral reward for incumbents.¹⁶⁷

House expert Gary Jacobson found in 2015 that the electoral advantage of incumbency for House members has been declining. Incumbency through much of the 1960s-2000s meant getting a boost in the high single-digits, generally speaking, but by the 2010s, the advantage had dipped to more like just three-to-four points: “The

¹⁶⁴ “Exit Polls,” CNN, Nov. 23, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls>.

¹⁶⁵ McGann, et. al., *Gerrymandering in America*, 107.

¹⁶⁶ Abramowitz and Webster, “Rise of Negative Partisanship,” 12.

¹⁶⁷ Abramowitz, “Moderation in the Pursuit of Victory May Not Help.”

incumbency advantage has diminished in conjunction with an increase in party loyalty, straight-ticket voting, and president-centered electoral nationalization, products of the widening and increasingly coherent partisan divisions in the American electorate. Consequently, House incumbents now have a much harder time retaining districts that lean toward the rival party,” Jacobson wrote.¹⁶⁸ In 2018, the incumbency advantage was less than two points, Jacobson found, which was the lowest edge since the 1950s.¹⁶⁹

In such an environment, the Republicans arguably benefit.

The median House seat, Nebraska’s Second Congressional District held by Rep. Don Bacon (R), voted for Trump by about two points while Clinton won the national popular vote by two points, so the median House seat is about four points more Republican than the national average. That is true even after some pro-Republican gerrymanders were unwound by various court orders throughout the decade, namely in Florida, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

If we expect presidential and House results to remain in alignment, and the median House seat votes to the right of the nation in presidential elections, that certainly is suggestive of an environment in which one would rather be the Republicans than the Democrats in the race for the House. Generally speaking, that has been the case in the post-1994 era, although not always.

Overall, there is considerable disagreement about the importance of gerrymandering to political outcomes. Political scientist John Sides and Eric McGhee take what is a reasonable middle view. On one hand, “Gerrymanders will likely be more

¹⁶⁸ Jacobson, “It’s Nothing Personal,” 861.

¹⁶⁹ Jacobson, “Extreme Referendum,” 24.

effective in the future because the partisanship of a district, independent of incumbency or any other factors, is a more important predictor of House elections than it was several decades ago.” On the other hand, “There is a lot more than redistricting to House elections. Democrats are concentrated in urban areas. Incumbents still outperform their party’s presidential candidate. And the electorate can still change its mind, as the turmoil of the last decade has made clear.”¹⁷⁰

Immediately following the Republican takeover in 1994, the House was closely contested but there were not big swings in seat totals from year to year. But that changed in 2006, when the Democrats took over, and the House has continued to feature big swings at regular intervals, with the biggest ones coming in midterm elections.

1996: Extensions of 1994

Two years after the Republican Revolution, the GOP tried to do something it hadn’t done since the New Deal: Re-elect a previously-held House majority. Republicans succeeded in that task and only lost three net seats—in other words, they suffered hardly any overall backslide from their monumental 54-seat gain in 1994. But the regional disparities in the results were telling.

In the Northeast, Midwest, and West Coast, Democrats made major gains in the House, netting 15 seats across the three regions in the midst of President Bill Clinton’s impressive, 8.5-point reelection victory over the former Senate majority leader, Bob Dole, who resigned earlier in 1996 to focus on his presidential campaign. Democrats

¹⁷⁰ John Sides and Eric McGhee, “Redistricting Didn’t Win Republicans the House,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 17, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/02/17/redistricting-didnt-win-republicans-the-house/?utm_term=.16d635b6e426.

actually narrowly won a majority of the seats in the Midwest, something the party sometimes failed to do when it otherwise held House majorities in previous decades. Had the Democrats simply held on to their current seats in the Greater South and Interior West at the same time, they would have regained a narrow majority. However, Republicans netted an additional dozen seats in just these two generally conservative regions in 1996, which protected their majority.

Most of these Republican gains came in the South, which was further aligning its historic conservatism with the United States' conservative party. The realignment was continuing and keeping the GOP ahead.

In Alabama, Republicans picked up two open seats, the Third and Fourth districts, that had been carried by both 1996 GOP presidential nominee Bob Dole and then-incumbent President George H.W. Bush four years earlier. The realignment was quite literal for three southern Democrats: Reps. Nathan Deal (GA-9), Billy Tauzin (LA-3), and Mike Parker (MS-4) all switched parties in advance of the 1996 election and easily won reelection under their new party banner. Another southern Democratic defector, Rep. Greg Laughlin (TX-14), lost his primary, but his Dole-Bush district would stay Republican: He was beaten by Ron Paul, who had previously served in the House, in the primary; Paul would go on to run as a Libertarian-influenced Republican presidential candidate in 2008 and 2012 (after having been the Libertarian presidential nominee himself in 1988).

In the Interior West, Rick Hill (R, MT-AL) and John Thune (R, SD-AL) won their sparsely-populated, Dole-won statewide districts, and Chris Cannon (R) beat Rep. Bill Orton (D, UT-3) in a district Dole carried by 29 points.

Not all of the Republicans' southern gains came on clearly Republican turf: In a Louisville-based seat, state Rep. Anne Northup (R) very narrowly defeated first-term Rep. Mike Ward (D, KY-3), himself an extremely close winner in 1994. "[I]n a year when almost all Democrats and most Republicans ran cookie-cutter identical campaigns, Northup showed originality in strategy and tactics," outraising Ward and attacking him over his vote against a bill to make English the nation's official language. She also criticized the tobacco industry, showing independence in a state where the industry was powerful.¹⁷¹ Northup won in a district Clinton carried by 13 points.

Redistricting also played a limited role. In Louisiana, the Supreme Court unwound the state's districts as constituting an illegal racial gerrymander. Rep. Cleo Fields (D, LA-5) saw the black percentage of his district slashed dramatically and decided not to run again; a Republican replaced him. However, two black Democrats in Georgia won reelection despite a new map that reduced the black percentages in their districts. A remap in Texas did not really impact the results, where in total Republicans netted two seats as Paul won and two other Republicans flipped open seats. Democrats flipped one seat in the Lone Star State as Nick Lampson (D) beat first-term Rep. Steve Stockman (R, TX-9) in a competitive district; Stockman had beaten long-serving Rep. Jack Brooks (D) in 1994, but Lampson flipped the district two years later.

Lampson's win was indicative of many Democratic takeovers in 1996: Reclaiming Democratic seats lost two years earlier in the Republican Revolution. Nine other Democrats won back seats in such a fashion, including David Price (D, NC-4) and

¹⁷¹ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1998*, 608.

Ted Strickland (D, OH-6), who beat the Republicans who had defeated them two years prior. Rod Blagojevich (D, IL-5) reclaimed the heavily Democratic seat that powerful House leader Dan Rostenkowski had lost two years prior; Blagojevich would later become Illinois' governor and, like Rostenkowski, would ultimately end up in jail over corruption.

All told, Clinton had won nine of these 10 districts that Democrats reclaimed. The one exception to this Clinton-district trend was Bob Etheridge (D), who beat Rep. David Funderburk (R, NC-2) in a district Dole won by 10 points. But there were extenuating circumstances: Funderburk and his wife were involved in an automobile accident in which witnesses indicating Funderburk was driving, but then left the scene and returned with his wife behind the wheel. "This issue probably made the difference," concluded the authors of the *Almanac of American Politics*.¹⁷²

A few other districts won by Democrats were ones they had lost in 1992 but which Clinton won by double digits in 1996; one, on Cleveland's West Side, was recaptured by Dennis Kucinich (D, OH-10), who would later achieve national attention as a gadfly Democratic presidential candidate. The two others were in Massachusetts; since 1996, Democrats have won every single House election held in this heavily Democratic state.

Overall, the 1996 election featured countervailing trends that were defined to no small degree by presidential partisanship. Given that the Republicans had surged to their first majority in four decades by netting more than four-dozen seats, their net decline of

¹⁷² Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics* 1998, 1062-1063.

just three seats in the midst of an impressive reelection victory by the other party's president represented a strong overall outcome.

1998-2000: The GOP loses ground, but only slightly¹⁷³

Much of leadup to the 1998 midterm was dominated by the travails of President Clinton, whose affair with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, threatened his presidency even as he enjoyed high approval ratings and in a time of peace and prosperity.

Clinton biographer Michael Tomasky summed up the pre-midterm thinking this way: “[I]t was expected that the Republicans would augment their majorities, and probably by a considerable amount. Rarely in politics had anything been so obvious.”¹⁷⁴ That assessment was informed by history: This was a “sixth-year itch” election, a midterm conducted during a second consecutive term of a party's control of the White House. There were some catastrophically bad “sixth-year itch” elections in the recent memory of the time: 1938, 1958, 1966, and 1974 all qualified (later, 2006 and perhaps 2014 also would). The president's party in those years were all undone by overreach, scandal, war, recession, or some combination of those factors. For Republicans, the hope was that the scandal that would deliver them victory was Clinton's dalliance with Lewinsky.

And yet, in many ways, Republicans were not set up for significant gains in 1998. Democrats had only made a minor gain in 1996, so they did not hold many newly-

¹⁷³ Portions of this section dealing with the 1998 election were previously published by the author in “The Shadow of 1998,” *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, June 6, 2019, <http://crystalball.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/the-shadow-of-1998/>.

¹⁷⁴ Tomasky, *Bill Clinton*, 118.

vulnerable seats, and they had lost many of their most vulnerable seats in the previous two cycles. Following his comfortable reelection victory in 1996, Clinton's approval rating was consistently very strong throughout 1997 and 1998, even as he would deal with personal scandal: He spent 1997 mostly in the high 50s in approval, according to FiveThirtyEight's historical average,¹⁷⁵ and in 1998 his approval was in the 60s, even after reports of his affair emerged in January 1998. The economy was strong and the nation was at peace. These are not the sort of conditions that were suggestive of a Republican wave. But Republicans had high expectations anyway. "Gingrich spent the fall boasting that he foresaw his Republicans gaining as many as forty House seats," Tomasky wrote.¹⁷⁶

This was probably unrealistic almost in any event, but there is at least some anecdotal evidence that the push for impeachment contributed to the overall result, a net Democratic gain of four seats. For the first time since 1934, the president's party had actually netted seats in a midterm election.

In NJ-12, first-term Rep. Mike Pappas (R) recited a poem on the House floor paying tribute to the polarizing independent counsel who investigated Clinton: "Twinkle twinkle, Kenneth Starr, now we see how brave you are. We could not see which way to go, if you did not lead us so."¹⁷⁷ Rush Holt (D) put the clip in campaign ads and eked out a three-point victory. Impeachment may have made the difference, although Pappas had only won by three points himself in 1996 in a district Clinton had carried by six. Jay

¹⁷⁵ "How Trump Compares With Past Presidents: Bill Clinton," FiveThirtyEight, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>.

¹⁷⁶ Tomasky, *Bill Clinton*, 118.

¹⁷⁷ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 2000*, 1059.

Inslee (D), now the governor of Washington state and a 2020 presidential candidate, was in 1998 a former House member who had lost in the 1994 GOP wave. He ran in a different, more Democratic district than the one he had lost four years prior and beat Rep. Rick White (R, WA-1), who himself had beaten another now-familiar name from Washington politics, now-Sen. Maria Cantwell (D), in 1994. Inslee ran ads arguing that “Rick White and Newt Gingrich shouldn’t be dragging us through this.”¹⁷⁸ In suburban Philadelphia’s PA-13, Joe Hoeffel (D) reclaimed another Clinton-won district four years after former Rep. Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky (D) lost it to Jon Fox (R) in the wake of her famous and decisive vote for Clinton’s budget and tax increase in 1993. Hoeffel stayed away from Clinton but did have First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton campaign for him.¹⁷⁹ Despite the above examples, House Democratic candidates generally did not run ads on impeachment; one who did, Chris Gorman (D), narrowly lost to Anne Northup (R, KY-3) in her Louisville-based seat, although the outcome was even closer when she had won her first term two years prior.¹⁸⁰ Gingrich, meanwhile, helped orchestrate a late October advertising blitz of key House districts focused on Clinton’s relationship with Lewinsky that probably was a miscalculation.¹⁸¹

Impeachment did allow some Democrats to break with the national party: for instance, Rep. James Maloney (D, CT-5), who was damaged by campaign finance problems, voted for the GOP motion to hold impeachment hearings; he won narrowly.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 2000*, 1681.

¹⁷⁹ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 2000*, 1389.

¹⁸⁰ Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 2000*, 680.

¹⁸¹ Ceci Connolly and Howard Kurtz, “Gingrich Orchestrated GOP Ads Recalling Clinton-Lewinsky Affair,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 30, 1998, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/stories/ads103098.htm>.

¹⁸² Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 2000*, 362.

Meanwhile, Democrats benefited from some key Republican retirements, such as that of moderate Rep. Scott Klug (R, WI-2) in a district based around liberal Madison. Clinton had won the district by 22 points in 1996; Tammy Baldwin (D), now a U.S. senator, would flip the seat in 1998. House elections did not follow presidential voting as closely then as they do now, but part of the 1998 story was Democratic districts like WI-2 coming into line with their presidential partisanship. Democrats also were able to hold some difficult open seats, like IN-9, where Rep. Lee Hamilton (D) had retired and where neither the Democratic or Republican candidate emphasized impeachment.¹⁸³

Overall, only 17 races in 1998 were decided by five points or less. The Democrats won 10 and the Republicans won seven. Perhaps in the absence of impeachment, the GOP would have won the majority of the closer races and could've netted seats instead of losing a small number. But even without impeachment they may not have performed significantly better than they otherwise did.

The 1998 results pushed the Democrats a little bit closer to the majority, setting up a battle for control amidst the 2000 presidential election, one of the closest in American history. As it was, Vice President Al Gore (D) would win the national popular vote by about half a percentage point, but Gov. George W. Bush (R-TX), whose father was the most recent Republican president, narrowly prevailed in the Electoral College. The House results reflected the closeness of the presidential race, but the Republicans kept the majority.

¹⁸³ David E. Rosenbaum, "THE 1998 CAMPAIGN: INDIANA; District May Be a Barometer, Thanks to a Tight Race and Early Results," *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/30/us/1998-campaign-indiana-district-may-be-barometer-thanks-tight-race-early-results.html>.

The nationalization trend continued. For the first time since the 1952 election, fewer than 100 House seats (only 86 total) voted for different parties for president and for House.

Many of the Democratic gains came in California, where they picked up four seats. Gore actually ran ahead of Clinton's 1996 margin in all four districts, an unmistakable sign of a Democratic trend that was bleeding downballot (remember, Gore's national margin was eight points smaller than Clinton's, meaning these districts became much more Democratic relative to the nation in 2000 than they had been in 1996). All told, Democrats would in 2000 set a high water mark for the party in the state, 32 seats out of 52 total.

Reps. Ron Klink (D, PA-4) and Rick Lazio (R, NY-2) left their seats to pursue unsuccessful Senate bids against, respectively, future presidential aspirants Rick Santorum (R) and outgoing First Lady Hillary Clinton (D). They were replaced by Melissa Hart (R) and Steve Israel (D), matching up the party affiliation of the districts with their presidential winners.

Still, not every seat corresponded to national partisanship. In eastern Connecticut, Rob Simmons (R) upset 20-year incumbent Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D, CT-2) in part because of the longtime incumbent's residency issues, which compounded other baggage he had amassed over a long career.¹⁸⁴ Still, the Northeast remained a Democratic bastion, as the party retained control of roughly 60% of the seats in the region. In northeast

¹⁸⁴ "Observers say residency issue sunk Gejdenson," *Associated Press*, Nov. 13, 2000, <https://www.middletownpress.com/news/article/Observers-say-residency-issue-sunk-Gejdenson-11939333.php>.

Oklahoma, attorney Brad Carson (D, OK-2) won a Clinton-to-Bush open seat. Jim Matheson (D), the son of a popular former governor, overcame Bush's 23-point victory to flip, by 15 points, the Salt Lake City-based UT-2 after the Republican incumbent, Merrill Cook, lost his primary amidst reports of "temper tantrums [and] staff turnover."¹⁸⁵

A rural trend toward George W. Bush helped doom Rep. David Minge (D, MN-2), who lost to Mark Kennedy in southwest Minnesota in a squeaker as the district swung from Clinton by six to Bush by 14. Retiring Rep. Pat Danner (D, MO-6) tried to hand off her sprawling northwest Missouri district to her son, a state senator, but another state senator, Sam Graves (R), rode a presidential shift from Clinton by four to Bush by nine to victory.

West Virginia, which was so Democratic in presidential elections that as recently as 1980 and 1988 it backed Democratic presidential candidates in the midst of significant Republican national victories, flipped to George W. Bush in 2000 as part of this broader trend. A 19-point swing from Clinton (by nine) to Bush (by 10) helped Shelley Moore Capito (R, WV-2), daughter of a former governor, win an open seat stretching across the central part of the state. She was the first Republican to win a House race in the Mountain State in 18 years; later, in 2014, she would become the first Republican to win a Senate race in West Virginia since 1956.

All told, there was hardly any net change: Democrats netted a seat, which could have been two had conservative Rep. Virgil Goode (I, VA-5) not left the party and joined the GOP caucus.

¹⁸⁵ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2002*, 1535.

Still, with Bush in the White House, and needing just five net seats to retake the House in the 2002 midterm, the Democrats on paper seemed like they would be well-positioned. But it didn't work out that way.

2002-2004: The Republicans extend their edge amidst reapportionment, war

For the second straight midterm—but for only the third time since the Civil War—the president's party netted House seats, this time under George W. Bush. This was an unusual midterm, contested in the shadow of the devastating Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. and in the run-up to a war in Iraq launched in early 2003. Bush “set a new precedent” as a midterm presidential campaigner, barnstorming the country in support of Republican candidates.¹⁸⁶ The president, whose approval ratings were in the 60s throughout the fall campaign, was clearly an asset.¹⁸⁷

But the Republicans had other advantages in the 2002 battle for the House. Namely, they had a strong hand in redistricting, much stronger than that to which they were accustomed.

Even though the 1992 reapportionment and redistricting round ended up benefiting Republicans thanks in large part to George H.W. Bush administration's push for majority-minority districts, Republicans didn't really have much true gerrymandering power that year: They only had direct control over the linedrawing of a minuscule five districts out of 435.¹⁸⁸ But in 2002, they had significantly more control: Democrats still

¹⁸⁶ Sabato, “George W. Bush Midterm,” 9-10.

¹⁸⁷ “Presidential Approval Ratings -- George W. Bush,” Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx>.

¹⁸⁸ Niemi and Abramowitz, “Partisan Redistricting and the 1992 Congressional Elections,” 813.

had total control over the drawing of districts in 135 seats, but Republicans had such power in 98 (the remainder were in at-large states or one where neither party could exercise total control because of divided government or some sort of specified bipartisan or nonpartisan process).¹⁸⁹ The places where the GOP held redistricting sway included several big, competitive states: Florida, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Republicans would use that power to significant effect. Meanwhile, several of the states where Democrats retained redistricting control were in the South, which generally were getting more and more conservative. For instance, Alabama Democrats attempted to improve their party's position, but they failed to make a dent in the GOP's five-to-two control of the delegation.¹⁹⁰ Georgia Democrats drew a gerrymander intended to allow the party to win two new seats the state had gained in reapportionment, but they ended up winning only one of them.¹⁹¹ They did also pick up another district, but their plan to push out Rep. Saxby Chambliss (R) prompted him to run for Senate, and he beat Sen. Max Cleland (D-GA) in a bitter race.

Something similar happened in Maryland. The Democratic gerrymander allowed the party to pick up two seats: Chris Van Hollen (D) beat Rep. Constance Morella (R, MD-8), a moderate in the otherwise very Democratic Washington, DC suburbs, and Dutch Ruppersberger (D) won a redrawn Baltimore-area seat designed to eliminate Rep. Bob Ehrlich (R, MD-2). However, Ehrlich ended up running for governor—and won, to the dismay of Democrats.

¹⁸⁹ Glen Bolger and Jim Hobart, "Why the GOP Could Keep the House in 2012," *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, April 14, 2011, <http://crystalball.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/gxb2011041402/>.

¹⁹⁰ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2004*, 54-55.

¹⁹¹ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2004*, 454.

The Republican gerrymanders were cleaner. In Florida, the GOP picked up the two new seats the state had won in reapportionment and also altered Rep. Karen Thurman's (D, FL-5) district, helping state Sen. Ginny Brown-Waite (R) narrowly defeat her in "an election decided by redistricting."¹⁹² Republican redistricters eliminated Democratic seats in states that lost ground in reapportionment, lopping off one seat apiece in Michigan and Ohio and two in Pennsylvania, and they otherwise gained ground in all three states thanks to redistricting handiwork.

Other states would effectively protect incumbents. In California, a new map gave the Democrats the extra seat the Golden State had won in reapportionment. For the rest of the decade, of 265 individual House elections for 53 districts held from 2002-2010, only a single seat switched hands: Jerry McNerney (D) beat Rep. Richard Pombo (R, CA-11) as part of the Democrats' 2006 wave. Otherwise, the state's map was static the entire decade.

All told, in states that lost districts because of reapportionment, Democrats lost nine seats and Republicans lost just three (some of these losses include races where two members of differing parties were forced into the same district, and the losing party is included as the loser in this tally). The states that lost seats were mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, which has been the usual pattern for decades, with exceptions coming in Mississippi and Oklahoma.

Those 12 seats went to states in the West and South. Of those 12 new seats, Republicans won eight and Democrats won four. That nets out to a five-seat gain for

¹⁹² Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2004*, 401.

Republicans from the shift in seats, which almost entirely accounted for their seven-seat net gain in 2002. However, three of the GOP's gains from the creation of new seats were in marginal seats: AZ-1, CO-7, and NV-3. While the Republicans won them in 2002, they would eventually lose them in tougher cycles later in the decade.

Had Bush been a liability in 2002, instead of an asset, Republicans might have lost the House anyway. But the combination of redistricting and reapportionment gave them a buffer from a Democratic comeback, and Bush took care of the rest. Republicans now held a 229-206 majority, essentially the same as their 230-205 majority won in the 1994 breakthrough. The incremental Democratic progress of 1996, 1998, and 2000 had been largely reversed.

The sorting out of the parties in the House continued apace. The combination of reapportionment, redistricting, and the 2002 results further reduced the number of crossover districts, those carried by different parties for president in 2000 and House in 2002. There were 46 Democrats who carried Bush-won seats and 40 Republicans who carried Gore-won seats in 2000; by 2002, there were just 32 Bush-district Democrats and 26 Gore-district Republicans.¹⁹³

As the calendar turned to 2003, the Democrats' prospects of winning the House took another major blow, thanks to momentous developments in the state that in the 2000 reapportionment passed New York as the state with the nation's second-largest House delegation: Texas.

¹⁹³ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2004*, 44-45.

The Lone Star State was continuing its turn toward the Republicans. While it hadn't voted Democratic for president since 1976, George W. Bush's candidacy took the state to a different GOP level in 2000: He won the state, where he was the sitting governor, by 21 points, giving Texas its biggest Republican presidential lean compared to the nation in the state's history. Two years later, Rick Perry (R), who had taken over for Bush after he became president, won the governorship by 18 points, and Republicans won an elusive majority in the state's House of Representatives. The GOP had previously won the state Senate, so the Republicans now had a "trifecta" and unified control of the government. As part of this sweep, Republicans won the state's overall U.S. House vote by nine points in 2002. And yet, Democrats retained a majority of the state's House delegation, 17-15. Republicans picked up the state's two new seats, but otherwise a court-drawn map created after the then-divided state government stalemated on a plan effectively gave "new life" to the Democratic gerrymander from a decade prior.¹⁹⁴

Still, the GOP's new power in state government allowed them to draw a new map. Even though almost all states redistrict only once a decade in response to the census (unless a court steps in to order new lines), nothing technically prevents a state from redrawing its House districts any time it likes. So Texas Republicans pushed through a gerrymander that would devastate the Democrats. Democratic lawmakers fled the state twice as a way to deny majority Republicans a quorum to pass this bill, but the GOP persisted and imposed the new map.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2004*, 1510-1511.

¹⁹⁵ Brian Beutler, "FLASHBACK: Texas Dems Fled State In 2003 To Block GOP Re-Redistricting Plan," Talking Points Memo, Feb. 17, 2011, <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/flashback-texas-dems-fled-state-in-2003-to-block-gop-re-redistricting-plan>.

It worked: In 2004, the GOP turned a 17-15 disadvantage in the state delegation into a 21-11 edge, netting six seats; that included another party-switcher, Rep. Ralph Hall (R, TX-4), giving GOP representation to the district that was the descendant of the one held by legendary former House Speaker Sam Rayburn (D). Given the trends toward nationalization, it may have been that Republicans would have broken through in the 2000s even on the old map: Six Texas Democrats (including Hall) held seats that Bush had won by double digits. But the mid-decade remap meant that the Republicans didn't have to deal with that hypothetical.

As Bush won a second term in a close battle with Sen. John Kerry (D-MA), Democrats actually netted three House seats in the 49 states outside Texas. But the six-seat net gain in Texas pushed the Republicans to a 232-203 majority, slightly bigger than the one they had captured in the 1994 wave.

Overall, just 58 districts would vote for different parties for president and for House, the lowest figure in the post-World War II era.

2006 and 2008: Bush Backlash, Obama Wave Reopen Democratic Opportunities on Conservative Turf

Following his reelection George W. Bush and the Republicans made a number of significant missteps. In 2005, Bush pushed for changes to Social Security that would allow Americans to invest the payroll taxes they paid into it (opponents called this a privatization plan). "Observers noticed that the more the President talked about Social Security, the more support for his plan declined," journalist William Galston noted in a

postmortem.¹⁹⁶ The plan was dying over the summertime and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast diverted the public's attention. Bush, who had become a polarizing figure over the Iraq war—which was becoming increasingly unpopular during and especially after his bitterly-contested reelection—saw his approval rating curdle throughout the second half of 2005.¹⁹⁷ By the end of the year, his approval according to Gallup was 43% and his disapproval was 53%. The conditions for a big midterm backlash against the president, backlashes that had not happened all that often over the past few decades but which were common historically in times of strife and under unpopular presidents, were emerging.

Perhaps hidden in the 2004 results was the Democrats' ability to win districts that, because of the growing nationalization of down-ballot results, perhaps on paper did not make much sense for them to hold. In a pair of special elections held in the first half of 2004, Ben Chandler (D, KY-6) and Stephanie Herseth (D, SD-AL) picked up a couple of previously Republican-held seats in districts that Bush had won (and would win in 2004) by double digits. Chandler and Herseth both held on in the regularly-scheduled elections in the fall. Chandler and Herseth were two of the 40 Democrats who won Bush districts in 2004; only 18 Republicans won Kerry seats. That Democrats remained at a fairly significant disadvantage in the House despite attracting significantly more crossover support was, on one hand, an ominous sign. On the other hand, it also perhaps meant that the party was figuring out ways to generate such backing in Bush-won turf by producing

¹⁹⁶ William A. Galston, "Why the 2005 Social Security Initiative Failed, and What it Means for the Future," Brookings Institution, Sept. 21, 2007, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/why-the-2005-social-security-initiative-failed-and-what-it-means-for-the-future/>.

¹⁹⁷ "Presidential Approval Ratings -- George W. Bush," Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx>.

appealing candidates who could create some distance between themselves and the more liberal national party. Creating such distance was made easier by the Democrats being locked out of power in Washington: It is easier to distance one's self from the national party when the national party does not have the ability to advance its preferred, liberal policy. During her general election campaign in 2004, Herseth—who would later go by Stephanie Herseth Sandlin after marrying former Rep. Max Sandlin (D), one of the casualties of the Texas GOP gerrymander—was pressed by her opponent on how she would cast the South Dakota House delegation's vote for president in the event that an Electoral College tie would be broken by the U.S. House of Representatives (because each state gets just one vote in such a scenario, and because Herseth would be the only member of the state's single-seat delegation, she would have total power to cast the state's vote). She said she would back Bush because Bush would of course win the state.¹⁹⁸

Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman Rahm Emanuel (D, IL-5), who had won Dan Rostenkowski's old Chicago seat after Rod Blagojevich won the Illinois governorship in 2002, decided “to seriously contest districts which on the basis of 2004 figures were not winnable.”¹⁹⁹ One of Emanuel's top recruits was a former NFL quarterback, Heath Shuler, who would defeat Rep. Charles Taylor (R, NC-11) in a western North Carolina seat; “An evangelical Christian who opposes abortion, Shuler

¹⁹⁸ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2008*, 1494.

¹⁹⁹ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2008*, 29.

couldn't easily have his views caricatured by the GOP,” the *Chicago Tribune*’s Naftali Bendavid observed in an Emanuel profile after the election.²⁰⁰

“One of the advantages the out party usually has is that its candidates are free to adapt to local terrain,” Michael Barone wrote in his introductory essay to the 2008 *Almanac of American Politics*. “Democrats in 2006 ran successfully as moderates or even conservatives in Indiana, North Carolina, Texas and Arizona. They were also able to run as full-throated Bush and Iraq war opponents in Connecticut and suburban Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and Upstate New York,” he added.²⁰¹ The old pre-1994 Democratic House majorities had featured a push and pull between liberal and conservative members; this new one would too.

However, this also would be a different kind of Democratic House majority than any in the history of the longstanding Democratic vs. Republican two-party duality. The Democrats had won a healthy majority despite winning just 41% of the seats in the Greater South; even in 1994, when the GOP won the House, the Democrats still held 48% of these seats. Meanwhile, the Democratic coalition was pulling more and more of its members from the increasingly liberal Northeast and West Coast. In 1994, the 68-member West Coast delegation was split 34-34 and the Northeast only had a modest 52-45 Democratic edge. By 2006, the Democrats had expanded this seven-seat net edge in these two regions to an astounding 67 seats. As part of this, the Democrats almost extinguished the Republicans from New England: They picked up both seats in New Hampshire after Republicans had held them uninterrupted since 1994, and they also

²⁰⁰ Naftali Bendavid, “The House Rahm Built,” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 12, 2006, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/politics/chi-0611120215nov12-story.html>.

²⁰¹ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics* 2008, 30.

knocked off two Kerry-district Republicans in Connecticut, leaving moderate Rep. Chris Shays (R, CT-5) as the only Republican House member from the six states of New England. Shays was one of a number of surprise GOP swing district survivors in 2006: others included Reps. Heather Wilson (R, NM-1), Deborah Pryce (R, OH-15), and Jim Gerlach (R, PA-6).

The Interior West retained its GOP edge, and the Democrats once again won a House majority without a majority in the still highly-competitive Midwest, where Republicans maintained a 46-45 edge despite losing eight net seats.

House analyst David Wasserman identified several reasons for the Democratic takeover.²⁰² One was scandal. Powerful House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R, TX-22), arguably the mastermind of the Texas redistricting power play, resigned before the election, leaving a write-in candidate to attempt to unsuccessfully defend his on-paper safe Republican district. So too did Rep. Bob Ney (R, OH-18) and Mark Foley (R, FL-16), the latter over a scandal in which Foley was found to have “exchanged sexually explicit instant messages with under-age male House pages.”²⁰³ Rep. Don Sherwood (R, PA-10) remained on the ballot but struggled with accusations that he had choked his mistress; he lost to Chris Carney (D) in a GOP-leaning northeast Pennsylvania district.²⁰⁴ Democrats would net four seats just in the Keystone State as the state’s GOP-drawn map did not stand up to the strain of the Democratic wave, turning a gerrymander into a dummymander. Democrats also clawed back a seat in Texas thanks to court-ordered

²⁰² Wasserman, “The 2006 House Midterm Maelstrom,” 117-120.

²⁰³ Wasserman, “The 2006 House Midterm Maelstrom,” 114.

²⁰⁴ “Congressman apologizes for affair in TV ad,” *Associated Press*, Oct. 4, 2006, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/15132240/ns/politics/t/congressman-apologizes-affair-tv-ad/#.XSPXUuhKjct>.

modifications to the GOP gerrymander from 2004: Ciro Rodriguez (D) beat Rep. Henry Bonilla (R, TX-23) in a December 2006 runoff. It was an improbable comeback for Rodriguez, a former member who had lost a primary to Henry Cuellar (D) in TX-28 in 2004 and then lost to Cuellar again in 2006 before beating Bonilla in the redistricting-necessitated runoff.

Georgia Republicans tried to replicate what Texas Republicans had done with their own mid-decade remap after taking control of state government in 2004, but despite their efforts they did not pick up any seats as Reps. Jim Marshall (D, GA-8) and John Barrow (D, GA-12) survived challenges from former Republican House members in districts Bush had won two years prior.

Democrats would net 30 seats overall, flipping the 232-203 GOP edge into almost an exact mirror opposite, 233-202 Democratic majority. House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D, CA-8), became the first woman to serve as Speaker of the House. The number of total “crossover” members expanded in the Democrats’ favor: Just eight Republicans in Kerry-won districts survived, while Democrats elected 62 members from districts Bush had won.²⁰⁵

The 2006 and 2008 elections can, in effect, be lumped together as a rolling wave against the Republicans. Bush remained dreadfully unpopular and the twin crises of the lingering Iraq war and a September 2008 financial crisis left the GOP at a major national disadvantage. Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL) would defeat Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) in an epic 2008 Democratic presidential primary and vanquish Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)

²⁰⁵ Barone and Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2008*, 29.

by seven points in November, becoming the first-ever nonwhite president. Democrats would net another 24 seats in the 2008 cycle, meaning that they had gained 54 seats over two cycles, matching the GOP gain from 1994. Their 257-seat caucus was nearly as large as their 259-seat membership won in 1992.

Some of the Democratic gains in 2008 essentially represented unfinished business from 2006. Shays, the lone New England Republican, couldn't hold on in 2008. Pryce, the suburban Columbus Republican who narrowly won in 2006, retired, allowing 2006 challenger Mary Jo Kilroy (D) to capture the open seat; another, Wilson, lost a Senate primary, allowing Martin Heinrich (D) to win her Albuquerque-based seat. All told, Democrats picked up 12 open seats while Republicans didn't flip a single one. Republicans did claw back a couple of the seats they arguably had no business losing in 2008, such as the seats formerly held by Foley and DeLay two years earlier. But Democrats replaced those by winning a couple of heavily Republican southern districts with conservative candidates, such as AL-2 and MS-1—the latter won by Travis Childers (D) in an early 2008 special election that he then held in the fall. Speaking of special elections, Democrats flipped another seat in early 2008: IL-14, a double-digit Bush seat that the former House Speaker, Dennis Hastert (R), left behind when he resigned (it would flip to Obama in 2008 as the presence of the Democratic-trending state's home-state senator on the ballot hypercharged the state's blue turn). Another Republican gerrymander from earlier in the decade fell apart under the Obama wave: in Ohio, Democrats netted four seats (Kilroy and three others) to take a 10-8 statewide majority in the delegation. They also picked up three seats in New York, taking a 26-3 majority in the state's delegation.

The number of crossover districts had ballooned to 83, but part of this was the size of Obama's victory, which was significantly larger than Bush's narrow victories in 2000 and 2004 (a president who wins by a bigger margin may naturally carry more districts than a closer winner).

The Democrats now had unified control of the federal government for the first time since 1993-1994. That trifecta ended in the crushing defeat signified in the 1994 midterm. Democrats in 2009-2010 would enjoy more policy victories than they did in that earlier period of power; they also would suffer a midterm defeat even larger.

2010: The Republican revolt

On paper, the Democrats in 2009 did not necessarily seem that much more overextended than the Republicans. Yes, they held 49 districts carried by McCain in 2008, but Republicans held 34 won by Obama. And Democrats seemed to be on the verge of a new golden age. Stuart Rothenberg, one of the nation's top political handicappers, summed up the popular thinking in an April 2009 column: "[T]he chance of Republicans winning control of either chamber in the 2010 midterm elections is zero."²⁰⁶

But in truth, the Democrats *were* significantly overextended. Of those 49 McCain-won seats they were defending, almost half (24) were districts Obama had lost by double digits. In fact, Democrats actually carried 31 of Obama's 150 worst-performing districts in 2008.²⁰⁷ The 34 Obama-won Republican seats were in much more marginal seats; just nine

²⁰⁶ Stuart Rothenberg, "April Madness: Can GOP Win Back the House in 2010?" RealClearPolitics, April 24, 2009, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/04/24/april_madness_can_gop_win_back_the_house_in_2010_96149.html.

²⁰⁷ Kyle Kondik, "The Politics of the Shutdown," Sabato's Crystal Ball, Oct. 3, 2013, <http://crystalball.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/the-politics-of-the-shutdown/>.

were ones Obama had carried by double digits. And now that Democrats were in charge, they would have to govern. In response to a massive recession prompted by the financial crisis that had helped Obama get elected, the Democrats passed an expensive fiscal stimulus bill with very little support from Republicans. The GOP, deep in the majority, were not inclined to give Democrats any bipartisan cover, and the backlash helped spawn the creation of the so-called Tea Party movement opposing the Democrats' policy program and giving some grassroots energy to Republicans. The Democrats then turned to other legislative priorities, such as a "cap-and-trade" bill as a way to deal with greenhouse gas emissions, which passed the House on a slim 219-212 vote, with 44 Democrats voting no and just eight Republicans voting yes.²⁰⁸ It died in the Democratic-held Senate, so Speaker Pelosi had forced her members to take a hard vote for a bill that never became law.

But the most notable policy fight of the 111th Congress came over health care. The Democrats, at what would end up being great political cost, eventually passed the Affordable Care Act, popularly derided by Republicans as "Obamacare." The bill would eventually expand health insurance coverage to millions of Americans, but it remained largely unpopular throughout Obama's presidency and Republicans campaigned against it heavily over the remainder of his time in office. The massive expansion of government—arguably the biggest new entitlement program since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs of the 1960s—put many of the moderate/conservative Democrats

²⁰⁸ John M. Broder, "House Passes Bill to Address Threat of Climate Change," *New York Times*, June 26, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/27/us/politics/27climate.html>.

in a pickle. Ultimately, 34 Democrats and every Republican voted against the final version of the bill.²⁰⁹

While the economy did begin to pick up in Obama's first two years, the recovery was slow. The combination of economic angst, opposition to the Democratic policy program, and the overextended Democratic majority would have explosive consequences.

Republicans smashed the Democratic majority, netting 64 seats and winning a majority bigger than any they had held in the 1990s and 2000s, 242-193. As part of that victory, they defeated 52 incumbents. The usual midterm penalty for the presidential party swung against the Obama White House in great force. And nationalization, which Democrats had bucked to some degree in their salad days of 2006 and 2008, also reemerged in great force: After winning 49 McCain-won districts in 2008, Democratic House candidates carried only 12 in 2010.

A study by top political scientists found that voting for the Affordable Care Act exerted a major electoral penalty on Democrats who backed the bill.²¹⁰ But strategic voting by Democrats who did not back the bill didn't save many of them: Fully half of the 34 Democrats who voted no lost in November. Some of the Democratic losers were veteran party leaders: Reps. Jim Oberstar (D, MN-8), Ike Skelton (D, MO-4), and John Spratt (D, SC-5), although these members occupied either conservative territory (Skelton and Spratt) or territory that would move right of center over the course of the following decade (Oberstar in Minnesota's Iron Range). Conservative Rep. Gene Taylor (D, MS-4)

²⁰⁹ Kondik, "The Politics of the Shutdown."

²¹⁰ John Sides, "Health Care Reform Counterfactuals," Monkey Cage, March 9, 2012, <http://themonkeycage.org/2012/03/health-care-reform-counterfactuals/>.

was another loser; so was Herseth Sandlin (R, SD-AL), the 2004 special election winner, and Rep. Chet Edwards (D, TX-16).

Other Republican gains came as a direct rollback of the Democrats' 2006 and 2008 gains: Of the 66 Democratic-held seats the Republicans won, 39 had been flipped by Democrats in either 2006 or 2008. As part of this rollback, Republicans essentially restored their original gerrymanders in states like Ohio and Pennsylvania, and also netted five seats in New York, where they had lost so much ground in the previous couple of cycles. Some of the Republicans who won those seats had lost them in those previous wave years, like Charlie Bass (R, NH-2), Steve Chabot (R, OH-1) and Mike Fitzpatrick (R, PA-8), won their seats back in 2010.

There was a strong regional trend to the House results that reflected longer-term partisan shifts. The Republicans made another huge leap in the Greater South, netting 23 seats in the region and grabbing 104 of 145 possible seats, or 72% of the districts. In the usually Republican Interior West, Democrats actually had gained a tiny and rare majority, 20-18, in 2008, but Republicans netted 10 seats, restoring regular Republican order to the region, 28-10. The competitive but often GOP-leaning Midwest gave the Republicans a 17-seat net gain.

The Northeast and West Coast proved more resistant. While the Republicans did net 13 seats in the Northeast, 10 of those came in just two states: Pennsylvania and New York (where the Democrats had built an unrealistically large edge). Both of New Hampshire's seats flipped, but Democrats held on to all the seats they had gained in 2006 and 2008 in Connecticut and also retained their monopoly in Massachusetts. The Republicans gained only a single seat on the West Coast, as Jamie Herrera Beutler (R,

WA-3) won an open seat in southwest Washington state. So even though the GOP enjoyed a massive wave, that wave reinforced some preexisting trends.

As part of the 2010 wave, the Republicans also enjoyed smashing successes down the ballot, netting hundreds of state legislative seats and flipping the governorships of several important states, such as Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. This would give the Republicans immense power over the new district maps that would be drawn in response to the 2010 census. Redistricting had not been a direct part of their 2010 victories, as no maps changed between 2008 and 2010, although one could argue that they benefited from their old gerrymanders in states like Ohio and Pennsylvania. But now, with the power of the pen in many places, Republicans would seek to lock in or even expand their newly-regained power in the House

2012-2016: The GOP retrenches

Republicans came into the new redistricting cycle controlling the drawing of 193 seats while Democrats controlled just 44.²¹¹ In many instances, Republicans tried to lock in the big delegations they had just won in several key states. In others, they tried to create new, big advantages.

The Democrats' "worst redistricting devastation" came in North Carolina, where Republicans had won control of the state legislature in 2010.²¹² While a Democratic governor was still in place, Democrats themselves had changed the state's redistricting rules to remove the governor from the redistricting process a decade and a half earlier, "reasoning they would always hold the legislature but voters might occasionally elect a

²¹¹ Bolger and Hobart, "Why the GOP Could Keep the House in 2012."

²¹² Barone and McCutcheon, *Almanac of American Politics 2014*, 1233.

Republican governor.”²¹³ Now the situation was precisely reversed, and Republicans took advantage: They undid a previous Democratic gerrymander and imposed their own, flipping a seven-to-six Democratic delegation into a nine-to-four Republican one that would have been even better had moderate Rep. Mike McIntyre (D, NC-7) not improbably survived.

Many other GOP gerrymanders were designed to protect what they had won in the 2010 wave.

For instance, Republicans had won a 13-5 advantage in Ohio in 2010, which was even better than the 12-6 edge that they held at the start of the decade. Ohio, which was losing population share relative to other states, lost two seats in the 2012 reapportionment. Republicans eliminated one Republican seat and one Democratic seat but otherwise drew a map intended to elect 12 Republicans and four Democrats, which the map successfully did throughout the decade.

Pennsylvania Republicans, who had to eliminate one seat, drew what analyst Sean Trende suggested might be “the gerrymander of the decade.” It combined western Pennsylvania Reps. Jason Altmire (D) and Mark Critz (D) into a reconfigured PA-12 in ancestrally Democratic but Republican-trending Western Pennsylvania.²¹⁴ The map had its desired effect: Critz beat Altmire in the primary and then lost to Keith Rothfus (R) in November; a 13-5 GOP majority in a competitive state appeared locked in.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Sean Trende, “In Pennsylvania, the Gerrymander of the Decade?” RealClearPolitics, Dec. 14, 2011, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2011/12/14/in_pennsylvania_the_gerrymander_of_the_decade_112404.html.

Republican redistricters on both sides of the Ohio and Pennsylvania border were aided by a Republican trend in Appalachia, the largely white, poor, and rural region extending from western New York all the way to northern Alabama and Mississippi.

In Michigan, where a GOP-drawn map produced a nine-to-six Republican delegation in four of the five elections in the 2000s (the only exception was 2008, when the Democrats took a fleeting eight-to-seven lead) in a competitive, Democratic-leaning state, Republican line-drawers combined two Democrats into one district and seemed to lock in a nine-to-five delegation. Wisconsin did not lose any seats, but Republicans there successfully solidified the state's 5-3 GOP delegation (Republicans had netted two seats there in 2010).

Barack Obama would go on to carry all four states (Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) in November 2012 with an aggregate 52% of the vote, but at the same time Democrats only won 30% of the House seats in them (17 of 56).

This heartland story makes it seem as though Democrats lost out through reapportionment, which continued to move seats from the Northeast and Midwest to the faster-growing South and West. But that's actually not what happened. If one traces the partisan fate of the seats shifted through reapportionment, eight Democratic seats and four Republican ones were effectively eliminated. But the Democrats won eight of the 12 new seats created elsewhere. Part of that involved certain limits on Republican line-drawers in fast-growing Florida and Texas.

In Florida, Republicans controlled the process in a very competitive, growing state that was adding two seats. The Republicans had won 19 of 25 seats there in 2010

but were at least somewhat constrained by new voter-approved constitutional amendments that aimed to make the line-drawing process less partisan. Republicans ceded the two new seats to the Democrats and otherwise tried to protect their existing seats, but Democrats ended up picking up two other seats thanks to poor GOP candidates: controversial Rep. Allen West (R, FL-18) lost narrowly in a seat largely new to him and Rep. David Rivera (R, FL-26) lost after being embroiled in several scandals.²¹⁵ Still, Republicans retained a 17-10 advantage in the delegation: Here was another state that was very competitive at the statewide level but where Republicans held a clear majority of the House seats.

In Texas, a long series of legal machinations led to both sides getting two of the state's four new seats. Amazingly, in a state with 36 House districts, only a single one really seemed competitive at the start of the decade: TX-23, which stretched from El Paso to San Antonio.²¹⁶ After Ciro Rodriguez (D) lost the seat to Quico Canseco (R) in 2010, Pete Gallego (D) won it back in 2012. The Texas delegation was 24-12 Republican, though.

States with nonpartisan redistricting systems, like Arizona, New Jersey, and Washington, produced contradictory results but generally helped Democrats in the aggregate. California, site of a static incumbent-protection plan in the 2000s, instituted nonpartisan redistricting through a citizens' commission method via ballot initiative in 2010. This formally robbed Democrats, who had won the governorship along with big state legislative majorities in 2010, of gerrymandering power, but the map they got

²¹⁵ Barone and McCutcheon, *Almanac of American Politics 2014*, 369.

²¹⁶ Barone and McCutcheon, *Almanac of American Politics 2014*, 1566-1567.

through the nonpartisan system would become better for them than anything they could've created themselves, in all likelihood. This was not necessarily an accident, ProPublica reported: "The citizens' commission had pledged to create districts based on testimony from the communities themselves, not from parties or statewide political players. To get around that, Democrats surreptitiously enlisted local voters, elected officials, labor unions and community groups to testify in support of configurations that coincided with the party's interests."²¹⁷ However, California was also changing and becoming more Democratic, which would continue throughout the decade.

As it was, Democrat netted four seats in the state, and it really should have been five. California voters also created a new "top-two" election system via 2010 ballot issue, which meant that instead of holding traditional primaries, all candidates would run together on the same ballot and the top two finishers, regardless of party, would advance to the November election. This frustrated Democrats in the newly-drawn and Democratic-leaning CA-31 in San Bernardino County; a split in the Democratic vote allowed two Republicans to advance to the general election.

Democrats were not without redistricting power entirely. In Illinois, they eliminated one Republican seat to deal with reapportionment and then beat four Republican incumbents on Election Day, flipping an 11-8 GOP delegation into a 12-6 Democratic one. In Maryland, a Democratic gerrymander effectively made it impossible

²¹⁷ Olga Pierce and Jeff Larson, "How Democrats Fooled California's Redistricting Commission," ProPublica, Dec. 21, 2011, <https://www.propublica.org/article/how-democrats-fooled-californias-redistricting-commission>.

for Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R, MD-6) to win, and John Delaney (D) beat him, creating a seven-to-one Democratic delegation in the increasingly Democratic state.

Not everything in 2012 was about redistricting. Democrats fought back to recapture both seats in New Hampshire, restoring a uniformly Democratic delegation in New England. Meanwhile, Republicans captured some seats that voted heavily for losing GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney, like the open seats AR-4, IN-2, and OK-2, as well as KY-6, where narrow 2010 survivor Rep. Ben Chandler (D), the 2004 special election winner, fell to Andy Barr (R).

Obama's reduced margin of victory (from seven to four points) combined with the nationalization of results and the largely Republican-dominated redistricting led to a major, historic reduction in the number of crossover districts. Only 26 districts featured split results for House and president: Republicans won 17 Obama-won districts, and Democrats won just nine Romney-won districts. So only 6% of districts featured crossover results; that was the lowest percentage in any presidential election year since at least 1920.²¹⁸ Overall, Democrats netted eight seats, cutting the GOP majority to 234-201. This was still a bigger GOP majority than any that Republicans had won during their previous dozen years of power from 1995-2007.

To get a sense as to the GOP advantage on the overall House map, consider that even though Obama won the national popular vote by four points, 51%-47%, Romney carried a clear majority of districts, 229, while Obama carried just 206. Similarly,

²¹⁸ Only partial results for ticket splitting between presidential and House candidates are available in Vital Statistics on Congress prior to 1952. See Table 2-16: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Chpt-2.pdf>.

Democrats won the national House popular vote by about a point and half but only translated that into about 46% of all the seats. Part of the problem for Democrats is that they were wasting votes in more places than Republicans: for instance, Obama won two-thirds or more of the vote in 81 districts while Romney won two-thirds of the vote in just 33. This provided some backing for political scientist Jonathan Rodden's argument that the Democratic vote is inefficiently distributed nationally. At the same time, it's also clear from a state-by-state analysis that the Republicans used their redistricting power to great effect in many key states in 2012.

The Democrats' retained control of the White House meant that Republicans likely would have no trouble holding the House in 2014, given the usual midterm presidential penalty and Obama's mediocre approval rating. That is indeed what happened. Republicans only netted 13 seats, but that gain gave them a 247-188 majority, their biggest since right before the Great Depression.

The results, in general, featured a further sorting along partisan lines. They also provided a preview of the tumultuous 2016 presidential election in some instances.

It was an ominous sign for Democrats that a couple of their few remaining members on clearly Republican turf, Reps. Jim Matheson (D, UT-4) and Mike McIntyre (D, NC-7), decided to retire. Both were very narrow winners in 2012, and it would prove impossible for Democrats to hold their seats; the GOP takeover made real the intended result of the North Carolina Republicans' House gerrymander, a 10-3 GOP delegation that took two cycles instead of just one to realize. Republicans also beat Reps. John Barrow (D, GA-12) and Nick Rahall (D, WV-3) by healthy margins in strong Romney districts. Barrow had been the last white male Democrat from the Deep South, and

Rahall's loss meant that Republicans now held all three House seats in West Virginia. The state's transition to Republicans at the presidential level, first evident in 2000, had now bled down the ballot.

Democrats did successfully navigate the California top-two primary in CA-31 to score a rare pickup. Democrats also beat Reps. Steve Southerland (R, FL-2) and Lee Terry (R, NE-2) in competitive Romney-won seats after both incumbents alienated constituents with a series of boneheaded moves and statements: Southerland, running against Gwen Graham (daughter of a popular former senator and governor), held a "men-only" fundraiser, while Terry seemed out of touch when he argued that House members should be paid during a government shutdown in October 2013.²¹⁹ These three seats represented the whole extent of Democratic gains; the party was powerless against all other Republicans, including even Rep. Michael Grimm (R, NY-11), who despite running under indictment on federal fraud charges easily won reelection (he would resign before the opening of the new Congress).

Republicans would net five seats by rolling back Democratic gains from two years prior, and they would also score victories in Obama-won districts such as IA-1, IL-12, and ME-2, all districts that were largely white and had below-average levels of four-year college degree attainment. It was not clear at the time, but these were the kinds of places that would shift very heavily toward Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump two years later.

²¹⁹ Kondik, "The State of the House," 79.

All told, the number of crossover districts grew from 26 to 31, but there were only five Democrats left in Romney-won seats, and 26 Republicans in Obama-won seats.

The most notable results of the election came in the primary season: House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R, VA-7) lost to Dave Brat (R) in a shocking result. Cantor probably was in line to be speaker of the House, as Speaker John Boehner (R, OH-8) ended up announcing his resignation in late 2015. While Cantor was one of just four House members to lose primaries in 2014, his defeat contributed to a growing feeling that the Republican base was in a state of revolt against the party's leadership.

But that was nothing compared to the nomination of Donald Trump to lead the party's presidential ticket in 2016. Trump's primary victory, and early polling showing him generally performing weakly compared to other Republican possibilities against eventual Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, seemed to open up the possibility that a wave against Trump could win Democrats not just the presidency for a third-straight time, but also the House.

Assisting the Democratic cause were new congressional maps in Florida and Virginia. The Florida Supreme Court would create a new map in advance of the 2016 elections after finding that Republicans had violated the "fair districts" standards that Florida voters approved in 2010. The changes were not extreme, but the changes contributed to the Democrats winning three GOP-held seats, FL-7, FL-10, and FL-13. However, the district lines also changed in FL-2, where Graham had scored her upset in 2014. Her district became unwinnable for a Democrat, so she opted not to run again. All told, Democrats netted two seats as a result of the Florida remap. In the Old Dominion, a federal district court found that Republican line-drawers had packed too many African-

American voters in Rep. Bobby Scott's (D, VA-3) heavily Democratic district. In unwinding portions of that district, the court made the seat of Rep. Randy Forbes (R, VA-4) much less Republican. He ran in a primary for an open neighboring seat, but lost; meanwhile, Don McEachin (D) won the new VA-4. That netted the Democrats another new seat they otherwise would not have won. (North Carolina also had to draw a new map in response to a racial gerrymandering finding, but Republicans were able to do so in such a way to preserve their 10-3 edge in the delegation.)

Unfortunately for Democrats, they did not win much new beyond their redistricting gains: They only netted six seats nationally in the midst of an election where presidential results diverged quite dramatically from 2012: Nearly half of the seats, 200 of 435, saw at least a five percentage-point change in Democratic or Republican presidential performance (or both).²²⁰ Journalists Ron Brownstein and Leah Askarinam found that, "From the presidency through lower-ballot races, Republicans rely on a preponderantly white coalition that is strongest among whites without a college degree and those living outside of major metropolitan areas. Democrats depend on a heavily urbanized (and often post-industrial) upstairs-downstairs coalition of minorities, many of them clustered in lower-income inner-city districts. They also rely on more affluent college-educated whites both in cities and inner suburbs." Specifically, they found that Democrats won 87 of 108 districts that had higher-than-average percentages of white

²²⁰ Kyle Kondik, "House 2018: The Ground Moving Under Their Feet," *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, Feb. 2, 2017, <http://crystalball.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/2018-house-the-ground-moving-under-their-feet/>.

college graduates and racial minorities, while Republicans controlled 152 of 176 districts that had lower-than-average percentages of white college graduates and minorities.²²¹

A few races featured rematches, most notably in the upscale and highly educated Chicago suburban district IL-10, where ex-Rep. Brad Schneider (D) beat Rep. Robert Dold (R) in the rubber match of their three-cycle battle (Schneider beat Dold in 2012 and then Dold beat Schneider in 2014). Dold could not overcome Trump's roughly 30-point deficit in the district. In NH-1, a classic swing seat that Trump barely carried, ex-Rep. Carol Shea-Porter (D) narrowly beat scandal-tinged Rep. Frank Guinta (R) as they battled in a general election for the fourth straight time (the Republican won in 2010 and 2014, the Democrat in 2012 and 2016). Shea-Porter would retire in 2018 and Guinta decided not to run again; Democrats held the seat. Republicans won back NE-2, lost in 2014 thanks to a weak candidate, and the open FL-18, which they had lost in 2012 (and had been untouched by redistricting). Both seats had been won by Trump, although not overwhelmingly.

Rep. Scott Garrett (R, NJ-5), who had pushed out the more moderate Marge Roukema (R) almost a decade and a half prior in a northern New Jersey district, fell to business-friendly Josh Gottheimer (D), who ran against Garrett's extremism: The incumbent had refused to donate to the National Republican Congressional Committee

²²¹ Ronald Brownstein and Leah Askarinam, "House Republicans and Democrats Represent Divergent Americas," *Atlantic*, Jan. 29, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/house-republicans-racial-education-level/514733/>.

over its backing of gay candidates.²²² That Trump ran below usual GOP performance in the district (he won by one after Romney had won by three) couldn't have helped Garrett.

All told, the House elections of 2012, 2014, and 2016 were defined by stability. Over the course of the three elections, Democrats made an aggregate gain of just a single seat (they netted 14, combined, in 2012 and 2016, but lost 13 in 2014).

Trump couldn't deliver Democrats the House in 2016—not even close. But his presence in the White House opened the door to the possibility of a Democratic takeover in 2018.

2018: The Blue Wave restores the Democratic majority²²³

Republicans found themselves back in total control of Washington in 2017. It may have been that this was not the outcome many voters in 2016 expected.

Instead of prompting a backlash, perceptions of Trump as a general election underdog may have actually aided Republican House efforts. Writing in advance of the 2016 presidential election, political scientist Robert Erikson found that in post-World War II presidential elections, a small but important group of well-informed voters may vote against the party of the candidate they perceive will win the White House as a way of providing a check on the president in the presidential year, as opposed to waiting for the midterm two years later to provide that balance. Betting markets, pundits, and the general public all saw Clinton as the favorite in the presidential election.²²⁴ Following the

²²² Jake Sherman and Rachel Bade, “Republicans sound alarm bells on New Jersey Rep. Scott Garrett,” *Politico*, Sept. 28, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/scott-garrett-new-jersey-race-congress-help-228838>.

²²³ Portions of this section were previously published by the author in “The House: Where the Blue Wave Hit the Hardest.” Full citation is in bibliography.

²²⁴ Erikson, “Congressional Elections in Presidential Years.”

election, Erikson speculated that these perceptions may have hurt Democratic House performance: “Plausibly, many who thought Hillary Clinton would win voted Republican for Congress to block, thus accounting for the Democrats’ surprisingly feeble performance at the congressional level in 2016.”²²⁵ While the differences were subtle, Trump lost the popular presidential vote by two points while House Republicans won the overall House vote by about a point. But in several Clinton-won, affluent, highly-educated House districts—the kinds of places one might expect to find some of the very sophisticated voters Erikson identified as potential presidential-year ticket-splitters—Republican House incumbents such as Reps. Mike Coffman (R, CO-6) in suburban Denver, Barbara Comstock (R, VA-10) in Northern Virginia, and Erik Paulsen (R, MN-3) in Minnesota’s Twin Cities suburbs, all ran at least 15 percentage points in terms of margin in their districts ahead of Trump.

Had Clinton actually won the White House, they all may have been fine in 2018. Clinton’s approval, just like Trump’s, could have been bad, and the usual out-party midterm trend would have been working against the Democrats, not the Republicans. But Trump winning put many of these seemingly strong incumbents in much more serious danger than their impressive 2016 victories would have otherwise suggested.

A closely-watched special election in metro Atlanta would help provide what for Republicans was an ominous preview.

Trump elevated Rep. Tom Price (R, GA-6) to be secretary of health and human services, opening up his district—which at one time had been held by Newt Gingrich—

²²⁵ Andrew Gelman, “Bob Erikson on the 2018 Midterms,” Statistical Modeling, Causal Inference, and Social Science, Oct. 1, 2018, <https://statmodeling.stat.columbia.edu/2018/10/01/the-2018-midterms/>.

and forcing a special election. Romney had carried the district by 23 points in 2012, but Trump only won the highly-educated suburban seat by 1.5 points. Still, even as that presidential shift was occurring, Price had won easily in 2016.

Republicans would hold the district in a 2017 special election runoff, but only by about 3.5 points, indicating that this was no longer a safe Republican seat. All told, the shifts at the presidential level were to be highly salient in many places.

Republican governance also imperiled the GOP majority. Health care, which had helped destroy Democratic majorities in 1994 and 2010, contributed to the Republican demise in 2018. During Barack Obama's presidency, Republicans railed against the Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as "Obamacare," which was the signature achievement stemming from Obama and the Democrats' brief, two-year unified control of Washington from 2009-2010. Republicans, and Trump, vowed to "repeal and replace" the ACA. However, when given the opportunity, Republicans failed to pass an alternative. The GOP spent much of the first half of 2017 trying to get a repeal through the House, initially failing but then succeeding. That bill narrowly died in the GOP-controlled Senate, though, meaning that several vulnerable Republicans found themselves compelled to cast a difficult vote on a bill that didn't even become law (it was reminiscent of the "cap and trade" climate change bill that was a tough vote for many moderate Democrats in 2009. That bill never even got a vote in the Democratic-controlled Senate after passing the House). Meanwhile, public sentiment about the ACA became more positive throughout 2017 and 2018, and the RealClearPolitics national

polling average showed net favorability for the ACA improving from being net negative before Trump took office to net positive after.²²⁶

That a liberal policy became more popular after a conservative government took over is very much in keeping with the rhythms of public opinion. Public opinion expert James Stimson has noted how the public's policy preferences can oscillate between the two parties depending on which one of them is in power: "Preferences 'zig' upward (toward liberalism) when Republicans control the White House and 'zag' downward when Democrats are in charge."²²⁷ Not only did Republicans not achieve the policy objective they desired—doing away with the ACA—they also found themselves open to Democratic attacks on the health care issue as Democratic candidates emphasized issues like maintaining the ACA's popular insurance protections for people with preexisting medical conditions.

Democrats also benefited from redistricting in Pennsylvania, where the state's Democratic-majority Supreme Court interpreted state law to force the unwinding of the Republican gerrymander.

The court replaced it with a map that, while not necessarily a Democratic gerrymander, "consistently makes subtle choices that nudge districts in the direction of Democrats," according to an analysis by political analyst Nate Cohn.²²⁸ The map altered the whole state, turning a map that Republicans drew to elect 13 Republicans and five

²²⁶ "Public Approval of Health Care Bill," RealClearPolitics, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/obama_and_democrats_health_care_plan-1130.html

²²⁷ Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 70.

²²⁸ Nate Cohn, "Democrats Didn't Even Dream of This Pennsylvania Map. How Did It Happen?" *New York Times*, Feb. 21, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/21/upshot/gerrymandering-pennsylvania-democrats-republicans-court.html>.

Democrats to the House into one in which Democrats seemed guaranteed to make significant gains. It radically reconfigured a southeast Pennsylvania seat held by Rep. Pat Meehan (R), turning it from a heavily gerrymandered swing seat into a district that Clinton would've won by about 30 points in 2016. Meehan had already announced his retirement in part because of a sexual harassment scandal, but no Republican could practically hold this seat. Rep. Charlie Dent (R), who represented a Republican-leaning seat that contained most of the Lehigh Valley, had also already decided to retire, but his seat went from one that Trump won by eight points to a more compact district that Clinton won by a point. Another southeast Pennsylvania seat, held by Rep. Ryan Costello (R), also became significantly more Democratic, prompting Costello to retire. In western Pennsylvania, Rep. Conor Lamb (D)—who had already won a March 2018 special election in a strongly Republican district under the old map—got a much less Republican albeit Trump-won district to run in and easily defeated Rep. Keith Rothfus (R) in a member vs. member contest in the Pittsburgh suburbs.

All told, Democrats went from holding five seats in Pennsylvania at the start of the cycle to forcing a nine-to-nine tie with Republicans. What's interesting to consider, though, is the possibility that Democrats could have netted four seats on the old, gerrymandered Republican map, too. We know that Lamb was capable of winning his district under the old map, because he won it in a March special election under the old lines. Additionally, because Dent and Meehan both eventually resigned, special elections were held in November for their old seats to fill their unexpired terms along with regular elections for the new districts. Democrats ended up winning the districts under the old lines as well as the new, although by much reduced margins in the old districts. Had his

district not been altered, Costello may very well have run for reelection and could have held his seat, but perhaps not.

Ultimately, the net change in Pennsylvania may have been the same without the new map, but the Democratic victories there under less favorable lines probably would have required significantly more investment from national outside groups. As it was, all four of the Democratic pickups in Pennsylvania came by at least double-digit margins.

Following the Pennsylvania redistricting, Republicans controlled 25 districts that Hillary Clinton had won in 2016, and Democrats controlled 13 districts that Donald Trump had carried. These were the naturally most vulnerable seats on both sides. Republicans ended up picking up just three previously Democratic seats in 2018 and, perhaps unsurprisingly, all three of them were open seats in Republican-leaning turf. One of those was Pennsylvania's redesigned PA-14, which was an even more Republican-leaning version of the district Lamb won in the special election and then left behind; the other two, MN-1 and MN-8, both voted for Trump by about 15 points in 2016 after voting for Obama four years earlier, and they were two of the relatively few remaining largely white and rural districts that Democrats held anywhere in the country.

Meanwhile, Democrats ended up winning all *but* three of the Clinton-Republican districts.

Many of the Democratic victories came in well-to-do suburban areas with higher-than-average rates of four-year college attainment. Coffman, Comstock, and Paulsen—three of the 2016 Republicans mentioned earlier in this chapter that ran well ahead of Trump in 2016—all lost in relative blowout fashion, falling by double digits to well-

heeled Democratic challengers. The suburban voters who shifted to Clinton in 2016—but not to Democratic House candidates—could not vote against Trump in 2018, so they did what for them was the next best way to register their disapproval: vote against their congressional Republican representatives.

To show how much had changed over the course of the decade, the Democratic gerrymander of Illinois designed the districts of both Reps. Peter Roskam (R, IL-6) and Randy Hultgren (R, IL-14) to be safe Republican seats in the Chicagoland suburbs/exurbs. By 2018, Democrats beat both incumbents.²²⁹

The Democratic near-sweep in Clinton districts stood out, but in addition to winning 22 of those 25 districts, the Democrats made similar gains among the Trump-won districts, picking off 21 in total. About half of them, 10, were only marginal Trump districts, though, ones he won by less than five points. One of those was a district made famous in the earlier special election: GA-6, in the Atlanta suburbs, where Lucy McBath (D), an African-American candidate who ran for office after losing a son to gun violence, succeeded in beating Rep. Karen Handel (R), the special election winner. McBath, among many other Democratic candidates, emphasized gun control as part of their platforms; unlike in 2006, when Democrats won the House in part because of culturally conservative candidates running in right-of-center districts, it was hard to classify many if any of this new crop of Democrats as being consistently conservative on hot-button social issues such as gun control, abortion, and same-sex marriage. That said, there were some Democrats elected in 2018 who did run as pro-gun candidates: examples include Lamb in

²²⁹ Sean Trende, “Redistricting Wars Begin in Illinois, RealClearPolitics, June 7, 2011, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2011/06/07/redistricting_wars_begin_in_illinois_110116.html.

western Pennsylvania, Jeff Van Drew (D, NJ-2), and Jared Golden (D, ME-2). Golden merits mention as an unusual winner: He finished very narrowly behind Rep. Bruce Poliquin (R), but because Poliquin did not receive a majority of the vote, the state's new ranked-choice voting system kicked in and allowed Golden to win because he had gotten a larger number of second-place votes. The Democrats once again held every seat in the six states of New England.

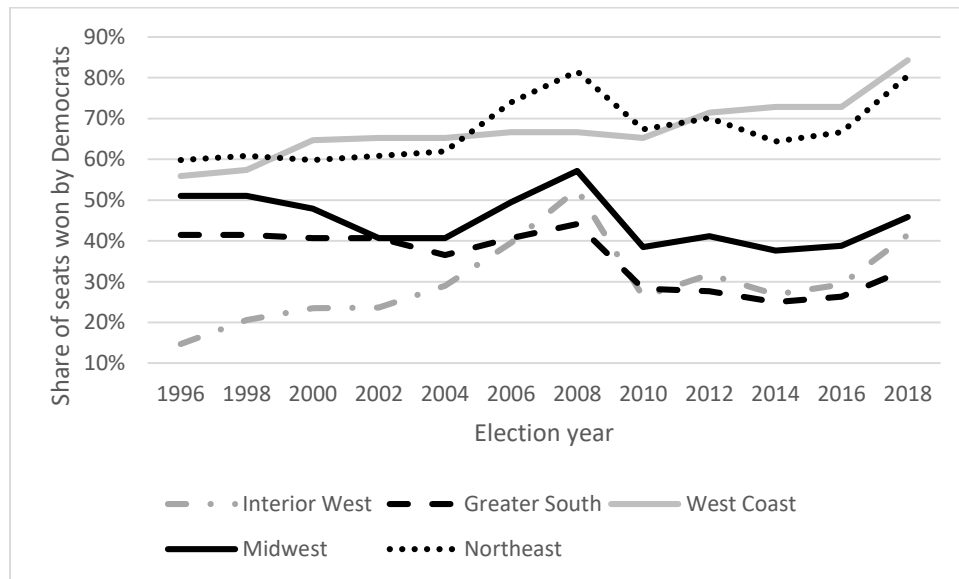
Democrats also won a handful of districts that went to Trump by double-digit margins. Perhaps the two biggest surprises came in Charleston and Oklahoma City, where Joe Cunningham (D, SC-1) and Kendra Horn (D, OK-5) won victories that few saw coming. Still, even these victories fit within the overall trend, as both districts cover urban/suburban turf, and Trump ran behind Romney's 2012 margin in both.

All told, Democrats ended up winning a 235-199 majority. That only adds up to 434 seats, though, because as of this writing, there was still one House contest that had not been resolved. Rep. Robert Pittenger (R, NC-9) lost a primary to Mark Harris, a former pastor who had nearly beaten Pittenger in a 2016 primary. Harris faced Dan McCready (D) in the general election in a GOP-leaning district that covers part of the Charlotte suburbs while sprawling east along the South Carolina border. On Election Night, it appeared that Harris won by just about 900 votes, but there was a catch: The state refused to certify the results because of emerging, and credible, accusations of fraud involving absentee ballots. A new election will decide the winner of the seat in September 2019.

The new Democratic House majority was built on dominance in the Northeast and the West Coast, where Democrats won more than 80% of the seats combined. That

included an astounding 46 of 53 seats in California (Democrats netted seven extra seats in the Golden State alone in 2018). This allowed them to overcome deficits in the other three regions, as shown in figure 6, which tracks the Democrats' regional share of seats from 1996-2018.

Figure 6: Regional share of House seats won by Democrats, 1996-2018



Source: Compiled by author.

Conclusion: Democrats are not incapable of untangling the Long Red Thread

If redistricting and realignment helped build the GOP's House majority, it can also be said that those factors helped destroy it, at least in 2018. Trump's candidacy accelerated a preexisting trend in which white voters with a four-year degree were becoming more Republican while white voters with a four-year degree were becoming more Democratic. These trends manifested themselves in the House results, contributing to immense vulnerability for Republicans in previously safe affluent suburban districts across the country. Democrats got a little bit of a boost from new districts that replaced

GOP gerrymanders in some places, although this was not the decisive factor in their ability to win a majority (although without new maps in Florida, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, the size of the Democratic majority would almost certainly be smaller).

So beyond redistricting and realignment, there was another “R”—reaction, as in the negative reaction to the election and actions of President Donald Trump—that played a role. Holding the White House would once again be a curse for the president’s party in the House.

The question then becomes: Can Democrats hold the House under situations that are neutral or even negative?

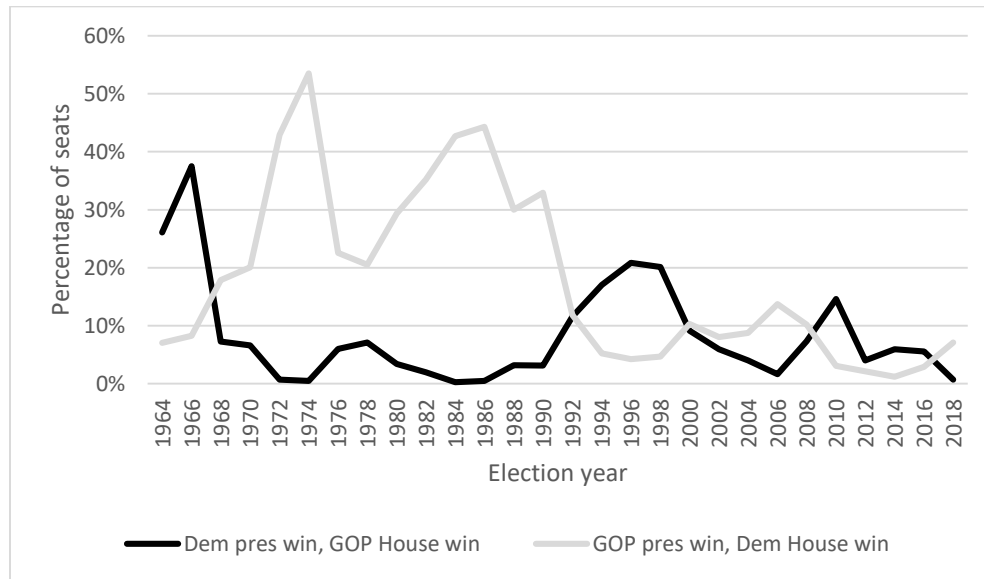
Conclusion: A Half-Century of Change in the House

Despite current Democratic control of the U.S House of Representatives, their majority may be fragile. Even though President Trump has underwater approval ratings heading into his likely reelection bid, it is possible that he could win a second term, and do so once again without winning the national popular vote. While Republicans will need to net at least 18 House seats to take a House majority, they could hypothetically do so just by winning Trump-won turf. They are defending just three districts won by Hillary Clinton in 2016, and all three are marginal seats where she did not exceed 50% of the vote. Meanwhile, Democrats are defending 31 seats won by Trump. While many of these seats also are marginal, Republicans could take back the House solely by simply winning all of the House districts held by Democrats where Trump won in 2016 by three points or more. Such an outcome is hardly guaranteed, nor is it even necessarily likely. But it does illustrate that, in a time of electoral nationalization combined with the GOP tilt of the current U.S. House districts, the Democrats may find themselves in a disadvantage without the national winds at their back.

That is the overall conclusion of this study. For a variety of reasons, the House has transitioned from a body where Democratic control was a given throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to one where the overall majority may be at least a little bit in doubt from election to election, but where one might expect Republicans to win when national conditions favor them or in years where the electoral environment is more neutral, like 2012 or 2016. Figure 7 shows how Democrats generally won many more districts won by Republican presidential candidates than vice versa throughout the earlier

part of this study; now that those crossover districts are becoming less common, Democrats may find themselves at a disadvantage.

Figure 7: Crossover House districts, 1964-2018



Source: Data compiled and provided by Jonathan Rodden.

However, it is also necessary to be humble about predicting the political future. As the long arc of this study should make clear, political coalitions are not necessarily static over time. It also may simply be that the House is at a point where we should just expect regular changes in the majority party as part of midterms where the presidential-out party mobilizes in stronger force than the more complacent presidential party. The last four midterms (2006, 2010, 2014, and 2018) all broke decisively against the White House. The two before that, 1998 and 2002, were rare instances where the president's party gained seats at midterm, but both featured extraordinary circumstances: The Republicans' miscalculation in trying to impeach Clinton in the former, and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and buildup to the Iraq war in the latter. It may have been that Democrats

would have won the House in 2002 barring the jarring impact of terrorism and war (although, as noted in Chapter Three, the Republicans had other emerging structural advantages in that election, too). Going back a little further brings us to 1994, when the Democratic hammerlock on the House finally fell apart in the first place. However, it is possible that the House will both feature a huge amount of volatility in the coming years and that Republicans also enjoy a generic advantage in the midst of that volatility; these factors do not have to be mutually exclusive.

At the end of this history of House elections since the 1960s, it's worth looking at just how much has changed—or stayed the same—over the course of a half century.

Every state had done something to comply with one person, one vote in advance of the 1968 election, and that election produced a 243-192 Democratic House. A half century later, voters restored the Democrats to a 235-199 majority in the House. While these two Houses separated by 50 years did not have the exact same partisan makeup, they were similar. And yet the sources of the Democratic majority were much different five decades ago than they are today.

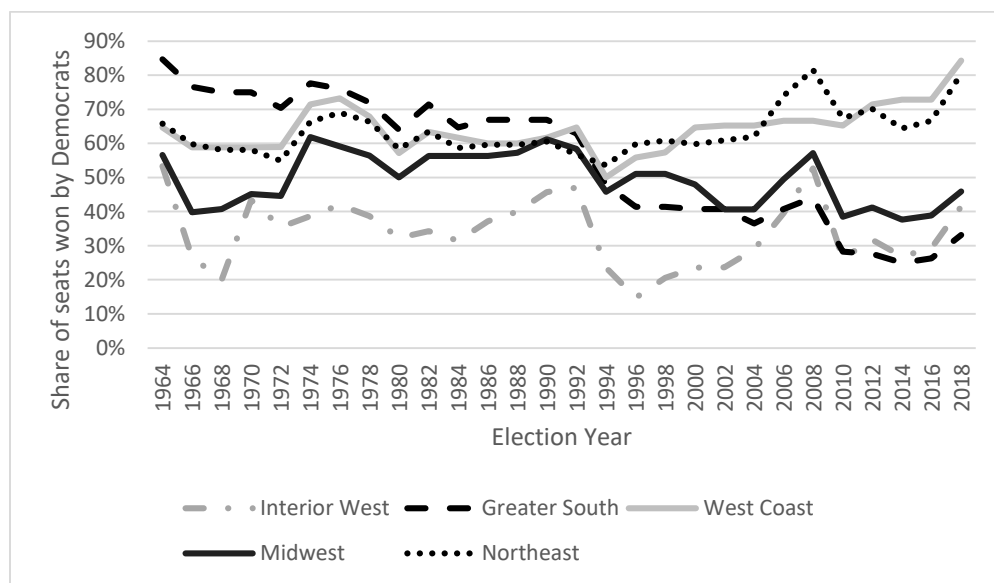
In 1968, Democratic strength was built in the Greater South. The party held 75% of the seats in that region, and this majority was augmented by 58% of the seats from the Northeast and 59% from the West Coast. The heart of the Republican minority was in the Midwest, where they held 59% of the seats, and they held 80% of the seats in the Interior West, by far the most sparsely-populated of the five regions.

By 2018, the Greater South had become overwhelmingly Republican. Democrats held only 33% of the seats in that region, and that was after netting 10 additional seats

there in that election. In other words, the Greater South had gone from being the Democrats' strongest region to being its weakest. Democrats still held the Northeast and West Coast, and in greater force, with 80% of the seats in the former and 84% in the latter. The Midwest continued to be competitive but with a GOP tilt, as Republicans held 54% of the seats there, and they also held 59% of the seats in the Interior West.

These trends in the percentage of seats won by Democrats in each region are shown for the entire time period covered in this study, 1964-2018, in figure 8.

Figure 8: Regional share of House seats won by Democrats, 1964-2018

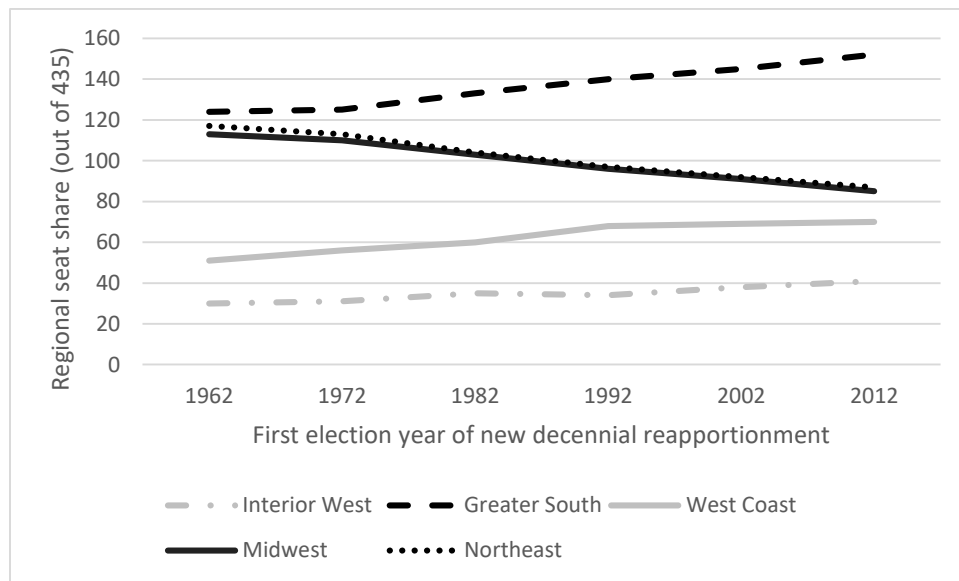


Source: Compiled by author.

Reapportionment had made major changes to the regional distribution of power. In 1968, the Greater South held a plurality of the seats, 29%, but it was followed closely by the Northeast (27%) and Midwest (26%). The West Coast (12%) and Interior West (7%) held less than one in five seats. Because of faster population growth, the Greater South now holds a much clearer plurality of the seats, more than one-third of the total

(35%). The Northeast and Midwest both hold 20%, with the West Coast (16%) and Interior West (9%) now up to a quarter of the seats. Figure 9 shows the share of seats by region from the 1960 census through the 2010 census.

Figure 9: Regional distribution of House seats, 1960 census to 2010 census



Source: Compiled by author.

The growth of the South combined with its Republican turn in recent decades has aided the Republicans in their ability to hold House majorities. And yet it is also fair to wonder how strong the GOP's grip will remain in this region. The two states that have accounted for essentially all of the House delegation growth in the region are Florida and Texas. The Greater South had 124 seats in 1968, and in 2018 it had 152, or a 28-seat net gain; combined, Florida (+15) and Texas (+13) account for all of that growth; the other 12 states' changes canceled out. Between the two states, Democrats had a huge 29-6 House edge in 1968. By 2010, Republicans had a 42-15 edge in just the two states, although that had eroded to 37-20 by 2018 (and just 14-13 in Florida). As the 2020

census looms, these two states appear likely to be the only two that will gain more than a single seat in reapportionment. Republicans, who currently rule both states, will have to grapple with adding seats but maintaining their control of the state delegations.²³⁰ The Republicans' usual strength in the Texas suburbs was tested in 2018, as they lost one seat apiece in suburban Dallas and Houston, and several other typically safe seats became much more competitive even though Republicans held them. There was much symbolism with one of the seats the Democrats captured in Texas: the suburban seat in Houston was TX-7, the descendant of a district created after the Reapportionment Revolution that George H.W. Bush carried, helping break what was at that time a Democratic monopoly in the Texas House delegation. The suburbs once provided a beachhead for Republican incursion in the South; they may be doing the same thing for Democrats in the South now. It may be that Democrats prosper in formerly-Republican suburbs at least while Donald Trump is president. But when and if Democrats re-take full control of Washington, they could push some suburbanites back to the Republicans if they pursue an ambitious, liberal policy program that these voters perceive as a negative. Health care changes, or the threat of such changes, played a key role in three of the last four House flips (1994, 2010, and 2018, but not 2006). That politically explosive issue may very well be a change agent in a future election as well.

Overall, there have been some hardening of partisan trends: the relatively smaller Northeastern delegation and the relatively larger West Coast delegation have become more Democratic. However, the Greater South has become dramatically more

²³⁰ "Arizona Gains Rhode Island's Seat With New 2018 Census Estimates; But Greater Change Likely By 2020," Election Data Services Press Release, Dec. 19, 2018, https://www.electiondataservices.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NR_Appor18wTablesMaps-20181219.pdf.

Republican. The Midwest and Interior West are competitive with an overall Republican lean. And within many states there has been change as well. These changes have generally balanced out in the favor of Republicans, although as recently as the post-2010 reapportionment, the actual shifting of seats, somewhat surprisingly, did not seem to give the Republicans any advantage (although the shift in 2002 did).

As both parties look ahead to the 2020 elections, and the 2020 census that will guide the reapportionment and redistricting process, they will not have any new guidance from the U.S. Supreme Court on how to draw the districts. In *Rucho vs. Common Cause*, decided in June 2019, the Supreme Court in a narrow majority decision determined that it would not intervene in partisan redistricting cases. The Court never has in the past, so one way to look at the decision is that it really does not change anything; on the other hand, it's also possible that the court's decision represents a bright green light to both parties to redistrict even more aggressively than they have in the past. However, both parties remain constrained by possible court intervention against overly aggressive redistricting based on race, and reformers can turn to state courts to undo gerrymanders, as they did in Florida and Pennsylvania in recent years. Of course, this is predicated on lawyers (or the courts themselves) finding something specific in state law that allows intervention against aggressive gerrymanders.

The redistricting process following the 2020 census may not be as Republican-leaning, as the one following the 2010 census was. In some of the states where Republicans held sway after 2010, like Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, Democratic governors are now in place, so in all likelihood those maps will be drawn under divided

government. Other states dominated by Republicans after 2010, like Michigan²³¹ and Ohio,²³² have adopted nonpartisan or less partisan redistricting systems through 2018 ballot issues in advance of the next remap.

While this study is voluminous, it is by no means complete. There are many individual results, including ones that many would find important and interesting ones, that are not covered. Several aspects of the election process, such as the amount of money that goes into elections and the various ways in which this money is spent, are not covered. Nor are the demographics of the overall membership and the amount of turnover from year to year. While the erosion of the incumbency advantage is noted, it is not explored in depth. This also is a work almost entirely devoted to elections as opposed to governance. Clearly, there is a lot one could analyze and discuss when it comes to the House.

The author's hope is that this particular work augments the realms of written information about U.S. House elections by telling the electoral history of the body over the more than half century since the Supreme Court's reapportionment decisions and exploring why a body that was dominated by Democrats is now competitive but also, in all likelihood, Republican-leaning to at least some degree.

²³¹ Melissa Nan Burke, "Redistricting panel will decide which Mich. U.S. House seat to kill," *Detroit News*, Dec. 3, 2018, <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2018/12/03/redistricting-commission-house-seat-kill-michigan/2066806002/>.

²³² Reid Wilson, "Ohio voters pass redistricting reform initiative," *The Hill*, May 8, 2018, <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/386839-ohio-voters-pass-redistricting-reform-initiative>.

Bibliography

- Abramowitz, Alan I. "Moderation in the Pursuit of Victory May Not Help: Evidence from U.S. House Elections, 1978-2018." Prepared for delivery at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, D.C., Aug. 29-Sept. 2, 2019.
- "Partisan Redistricting and the 1982 Congressional Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 45, no. 3 (Aug. 1983): 767-770.
- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Steven Webster. "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections in the 21st Century." *Electoral Studies: An International Journal* 41 (March 2016): 12-22.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen and James M. Snyder, Jr. *The End of Inequality: One Person, One Vote and the Transformation of American Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2008.
- Backstrom, Charles, Samuel Krislov, and Leonard Robins. "Desperately Seeking Standards: The Court's Frustrating Attempts to Limit Political Gerrymandering." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39, no. 3 (July 2006): 409-415.
- Barone, Michael. *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: The Free Press, 1990.
- Barone, Michael with Richard E. Cohen. *The Almanac of American Politics 2002*. Washington: National Journal, 2001.
- The Almanac of American Politics 2004*. Washington: National Journal, 2003.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 2006. Washington: National Journal, 2005.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 2008. Washington: National Journal, 2007.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 2010. Washington: National Journal, 2009.

Barone, Michael and Chuck McCutcheon. *The Almanac of American Politics* 2012.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 2014. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
2013.

Barone, Michael and Grant Ujifusa. *The Almanac of American Politics* 1978. New York:

E.P. Dutton, 1977.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1980. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1982. Washington: Barone & Co., 1981.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1984. Washington: National Journal, 1983.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1986. Washington: National Journal, 1985.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1988. Washington: National Journal, 1987.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1990. Washington: National Journal, 1989.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1992. Washington: National Journal, 1991.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1994. Washington: National Journal, 1993.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1996. Washington: National Journal, 1995.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 1998. Washington: National Journal, 1997.

-----*The Almanac of American Politics* 2000. Washington: National Journal, 1999.

Barone, Michael, Grant Ujifusa, and Douglas Matthews. *The Almanac of American*

Politics 1972. Boston: Gambit, 1972.

- *The Almanac of American Politics 1974*. Boston: Gambit, 1973.
- *The Almanac of American Politics 1976*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1975.
- Busch, Andrew. *Horses in Midstream: U.S. Midterm Elections and Their Consequences, 1894-1998*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999.
- Canon, David T. *Race, Redistricting, and Representation: The Unintended Consequences of Black Majority Districts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Cohen, Richard E. with James A. Barnes. *The Almanac of American Politics 2016*. Bethesda, MD: Columbia Books, 2015.
- The Almanac of American Politics 2018*. Bethesda, MD: Columbia Books, 2017.
- Connelly, William F., Jr., and John J. Pitney, Jr. *Congress's Permanent Minority? Republicans in the U.S. House*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994.
- Cox, Gary W. and Jonathan N. Katz. *Elbridge Gerry's Salamander: The Electoral Consequences of the Reapportionment Revolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- "The Reapportionment Revolution and Bias in U. S. Congressional Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 3 (July 1999): 812-841.
- Cummings, Milton C., Jr. "Reapportionment in the 1970s: Its Effects on Congress." In *Reapportionment in the 1970s*, edited by Nelson W. Polsby, 209-247. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Cunningham, Maurice T. *Maximization, Whatever the Cost: Race, Redistricting, and the Department of Justice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001.

- Dimock, Michael A. and Gary C. Jacobson. "Checks and Choices: The House Bank Scandal's Impact on Voters in 1992." *The Journal of Politics* 57, no. 4 (Nov. 1995): 1143-1159.
- Dow, Jay K. *Electing the House: The Adoption and Performance of the US Single-Member District Electoral System*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017.
- Elliott, Ward. "Prometheus, Proteus, Pandora, and Procrustes Unbound: The Political Consequences of Reapportionment." *University of Chicago Law Review* 37, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 474-492.
- Engstrom, Erik J. *Partisan Gerrymandering and the Construction of American Democracy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013.
- Engstrom, Richard L. "Missing the Target: The Supreme Court, 'One Person, One Vote,' and Partisan Gerrymandering." In *Redistricting in the New Millennium*, edited by Peter F. Galderisi, 313-340. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005.
- Erikson, Robert S. "Congressional Elections in Presidential Years: Presidential Coattails and Strategic Voting," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (August 2016), 551-574.
- "Malapportionment, Gerrymandering, and Party Fortunes in Congressional Elections." *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 4 (Dec. 1972): 1234-1245.
- "Why the Democrats Lose Presidential Elections: Toward a Theory of Optimal Loss." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 22, no. 1 (March 1989): 30-35.

- Gelman, Andrew and Gary King. "Enhancing Democracy Through Legislative Redistricting." *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (Sept. 1994): 541-559.
- Glazer, Amihai, Bernard Grofman, and Marc Robbins. "Partisan and Incumbency Effects of 1970s Congressional Redistricting." *American Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 3 (Aug. 1987): 680-707.
- Griffith, Elmer C. *The Rise and Development of the Gerrymander*. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1907.
- Grofman, Bernard and Thomas L. Brunell. "The Art of the Dummymander: The Impact of Recent Redistrictings on the Partisan Makeup of Southern House Seats." In *Redistricting in the New Millennium*, edited by Peter F. Galderisi, 183-199. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005.
- Grose, Christian R. *Congress in Black and White: Race and Representation in Washington and at Home*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Hacker, Andrew. *Congressional Districting: The Issue of Equal Representation*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1963.
- Harris, Douglas B. "Legislative Parties and Leadership Choice: Confrontation or Accommodation in the 1989 Gingrich-Madigan Whip Race" *American Politics Research* 34, no. 2 (March 2006): 189-222.
- Harris, John F. *The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House*. New York: Random House, 2006.
- Hopkins, David A. *Red Fighting Blue: How Geography and Electoral Rules Polarize American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

- Hunter, Thomas Rogers. "The First Gerrymander? Patrick Henry, James Madison, James Monroe, and Virginia's 1788 Congressional Districting." *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 781-820.
- Jacobson, Gary C. "Extreme Referendum: Donald Trump and the 2018 Midterm Elections." *Political Science Quarterly* 134, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 9-38.
- "It's Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 3 (July 2015): 861-873.
- The Electoral Origins of Divided Government: Competition in U.S. House Elections, 1946-1988*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990.
- Jacobson, Gary C. and Jamie L. Carson. *The Politics of Congressional Elections, Ninth Edition*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016.
- Issacharoff, Samuel. "Gerrymandering and Political Cartels." *Harvard Law Review* 116, no. 2 (Dec. 2002): 593-648.
- Kondik, Kyle. "The House: Where the Blue Wave Hit the Hardest." In *The Blue Wave: The 2018 Midterms and What They Mean for the 2020 Elections*, edited by Larry J. Sabato and Kyle Kondik, 98-114. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.
- "The State of the House." In *The Surge: 2014's Big GOP Win and What It Means For the Next Presidential Election*, edited by Larry J. Sabato, Kyle Kondik, and Geoffrey Skelley, 73-85. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.
- Kornacki, Steve. *The Red and the Blue: The 1990s and the Birth of Political Tribalism*. New York: HarperCollins, 2018.

- Lee, Frances E. *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Lublin, David. *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Lyons, Michael and Peter F. Galderisi. "Incumbency, Reapportionment, and U.S. House Redistricting." *Political Research Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (Dec. 1995): 857-871.
- Mann, Thomas E. "Is the House Unresponsive to Change?" In *Elections American Style*, edited by A. James Reichley, 261-282. Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1987.
- "Redistricting Reform: What is Desirable? Possible." In *Party Lines: Competition, Partisanship, and Congressional Redistricting*, edited by Thomas E. Mann and Bruce E. Cain, 92-114. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2005.
- Martis, Kenneth C. *The Historical Atlas of United States Congressional Districts, 1789-1983*. New York: Free Press, 1982.
- Mayhew, David R. "Congressional Representation: Theory and Practice in Drawing the Districts." In *Reapportionment in the 1970s*, edited by Nelson W. Polsby, 249-290. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

McGann, Anthony, Charles Anthony Smith, Michael Latner, and Alex Keena.

Gerrymandering in America: The House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, and the Future of Popular Sovereignty. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

McKee, Seth C. *Republican Ascendancy in Southern U.S. House Elections*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010.

Monmonier, Mark. *Bushmanders and Bullwinkles: How Politicians Manipulate Electronic Maps and Census Data to Win Elections*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Niemi, Richard G. and Alan I. Abramowitz. "Partisan Redistricting and the 1992 Congressional Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 56, no. 3 (Aug. 1994): 811-817.

Nokken, Timothy P. and Keith T. Poole. "Congressional Party Defection in American History." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Nov. 2004): 545-568.

Persily, Nathaniel, Thad Kousser, and Patrick Egan. "The Complicated Impact of One Person, One Vote on Political Competition and Representation." *North Carolina Law Review* 80, no. 4 (2002): 1299-1352.

Rae, Nicol C. *Southern Democrats*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Remini, Robert V. *The House: The History of the House of Representatives*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

Rodden, Jonathan. *Why Cities Lose: The Deep Roots of the Urban-Rural Political Divide*. New York: Basic Books, 2019.

- Rosenfeld, Sam. *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Rush, Mark E. *Does Redistricting Make a Difference? Partisan Representation and Electoral Behavior*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Sabato, Larry J. "The George W. Bush Midterm." In *Midterm Madness: The Elections of 2002*, edited by Larry J. Sabato, 1-34. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.
- Scammon, Richard M. *America Votes 6 (1964): A Handbook of Contemporary Voting Statistics*. Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1966.
- *America Votes 7 (1966): A Handbook of Contemporary Voting Statistics*. Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1968.
- *America Votes 8 (1968): A Handbook of Contemporary Voting Statistics*. Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1967.
- Seabrook, Nicholas R. *Drawing the Lines: Constraints on Partisan Gerrymandering in U.S. Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017.
- Sickels, Robert J. "Dragons, Bacon Strips and Dumbbells. Who's Afraid of Reapportionment?" *The Yale Law Journal* 75, no. 8 (July 1966): 1300-1308.
- Stephanopoulos, Nicholas O. and Eric M. McGhee. "Partisan Gerrymandering and the Efficiency Gap." *University of Chicago Law Review* 82, no. 2 (March 2015): 831-900.

- Stimson, James A. *Tides of Consent, Second Edition*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Tomasky, Michael. *Bill Clinton*. New York: Times Books, 2017.
- Trende, Sean. *The Lost Majority: Why the Future of Government is Up for Grabs—and Who Will Take It*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Tufte, Edward R. "The Relationship Between Seats and Votes in Two-Party Systems." *American Political Science Review* 67, no. 2 (June 1973): 540-554.
- Voss, D. Stephen and David Lublin. "Black Incumbents, White Districts: An Appraisal of the 1996 Congressional Elections." *American Politics Research* 29, no. 2 (March 2001): 141-182.
- Wasserman, David. "The 2006 House Midterm Maelstrom." In *The Sixth Year Itch: The Rise and Fall of the George W. Bush Presidency*," edited by Larry J. Sabato, 97-133. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

Curriculum Vita

Kyle Kondik is managing editor of *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, a nonpartisan political newsletter on campaigns and elections produced by the University of Virginia Center for Politics. He analyzes U.S. House elections as well as those for president, Senate, and governors. He is also the center's communications director and manages the center's Washington, DC office. He is the author of *The Bellwether: Why Ohio Picks the President* (2016, Ohio University Press) and has been an editor of and contributor to several other books on American campaigns and elections.

Kyle was born on Oct. 11, 1983 in Parma, Ohio and grew up in Independence, a suburb of Cleveland. He attended Ohio University, where he received his bachelor's degree in journalism in 2006. He and his wife, Lottie Walker, live in Washington, D.C.