

This Year Anti-Incumbency Movement Succeeds or Fails

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For some years a [number of groups](#) have mounted an [anti-incumbency campaign](#) aimed at ridding Congress of the huge majority that keep getting reelected despite miserable performance. This year's midterm elections provide the ultimate test for all the anti-incumbency sentiment that has bubbled up over many years. This year more than all others there is a huge amount of public discontent with Congress which is solidly supported by the cowardly, partisan actions or inactions that explain why so many Americans are fed up with the two-party controlled political system. Rightfully, many, many Americans see the country on the wrong track.

An economy without any real energy for ordinary Americans, unemployment that is more like 20 percent rather than the official 10 percent figure, two enormously costly and useless wars and a regulatory system that has allowed corporations to decimate our natural environment and financial system. All these and much more justify voting out nearly all incumbents.

So what will happen? Will the tea party movement produce election results that throw out incumbents? Will angry Americans across the political spectrum have the courage to reject their own members of the House and Senate that are incumbents? Or will people succumb to the well financed campaigns of incumbent Democrats and Republicans, believe all the campaign lies and keep reelecting incumbents as they have done for a very long time?

Data from the Center for Responsive Politics shows that from 1964 through 2008, incumbents in the House of Representatives averaged a 93 percent re-election rate; members of the Senate averaged 83 percent. Will 2010 really be different?

Some people think so. How interesting that 2010 is clearly the year of the challenger with roughly 2,300 non-incumbent candidates seeking to fill 471 open congressional seats this year, more than any year since the mid-1970s. Even more interesting is that there are nearly twice as many Republican candidates seeking office as Democrats.

Various recent polls show strong public interest in voting out incumbents. A CNN poll found 47 percent of the public is more likely to vote for a challenger rather than an incumbent running for re-election at the federal, state or local level. An earlier poll by ABC News/Washington Post found just a third of registered voters were inclined to re-elect their representatives to congress. And a Harris Interactive poll found that half of Americans (49%) say almost everyone in Congress, including their representative, should be thrown out.

The newest poll results are even more intriguing. In a [USA Today/Gallup poll](#) out days ago, 6 in 10 registered voters say they would rather vote for a candidate who has never served in Congress than for one who has. This sentiment rises to about 7 in 10 independents and Republicans, but is shared by just about 4 in 10 Democrats, who are seeking to maintain their Congressional majority. Just 32 percent of voters in the poll say most members of Congress deserve re-election, while 63 percent say they do not - one of the worst levels in Gallup polls dating to 1992. And while more, 50 percent, say their own representative deserves to be re-elected, that too is near the all-time low that Gallup has recorded.

But will voter action in the coming elections follow these sentiments?

The first good news is that there have been five failed attempts by incumbents this year to win their party's primary nomination.

Does American democracy have any legitimacy and vitality? We will know after the mid-term elections. If there is no marked reduction in winning incumbents, then the answer is a depressing NO. And that reality will signify that elections no longer offer the opportunity to improve our nation.

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