

Widespread Public Anger: Voting out incumbents. It Didn't Happen

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Americans Voted: Few Incumbent Bums Out

For some years a number of groups have been advocating voting out incumbents in Congress, both the House and the Senate, as a path to reform and improve the US political system. You might have thought that with this year's incredible widespread public anger with both major parties and the remarkably low confidence level in Congress this anti-incumbency movement would have scored a huge victory. It did not happen.

Even more surprising, perhaps, because for many months before the elections there was endless media predictions that incumbents were at risk of losing their seats, which was backed up by hundreds of polls showing historical high levels of voter dissatisfaction with Congress.

Over at [voidnow.org](#) one of the oldest and vocal anti-incumbency groups there is this delusional chest-beating good news: "Congratulations Vote Out Incumbents voters. 15 Senate Incumbents stepped down or lost, and only 25 Senators sought reelection. 57 House incumbents lost, and 37 chose not to run again. (91 House Incumbents gone, 21.6%)."

Apparently delusion rules within this movement. First of all, no credit should be given for those members who decided not to run for reelection. What level of reelection rate should be considered a big victory? I would be impressed if that rate was 50 percent or less, because typical reelection rates have very high. For example, according to data at [Open Secrets](#), it was 88 percent in 1992 and 94 percent for 2006 and 2008 for the House. In the Senate it was 79 percent in 2006 and 83 percent in 2008.

At the [Rundown blog](#) from the PBS Newshour a far more accurate account was given for this year's midterm elections. In the House 53 members lost their (this does not count members who quit, ran for higher office or lost their primary) in 2010. But that is still just 13 percent of House incumbents who ran for office and lost - meaning that 87 percent seeking office were reelected. Note that in 27 House races, voters had no choice because only one candidate was on the ballot.

Interestingly, this reelection result was [predicted](#) before the election by professor John Sides who found a statistically valid correlation between past reelection rates and Gallup poll results on the percentage of voters rejecting their own Representatives. Even when that dissatisfaction rate rose to 40 percent this year, a high reelection rate [resulted](#). In fact, that correlation indicates that even if 100 percent of voters rejected incumbents, the vast majority would still be reelected!

In the Senate, where incumbent loses are more common, only four incumbent Senators running for reelection lost their seats. That produced a 90 percent reelection rate.

What do we see? The House reelection rate was down slightly from recent years while the rate in the Senate was higher. To be crystal clear, out of 435 seats, 351 incumbents will be returning to the House in January, according to [one analysis](#). In the Senate, out of 100 seats, 77 incumbents will return in January. Does that sound like some revolution happened this year? And note how incumbent, establishment members will be running both the majorities and minorities in both the House and Senate.

I conclude that the anti-incumbency movement ought to fold up and close down; it has proved to be a totally ineffective movement and strategy to reform the abysmal US government system.

Why has the anti-incumbency movement failed? There are multiple reasons, including: the stupidity of voters who succumb to all the campaign lies and rhetoric from both major parties, the way House districts are gerrymandered to favor one party or the other, the lack of voting by the most fed up citizens, voting for lesser-evil candidates, the inability of third parties to mount really effective campaigns, enormous financial backing of incumbents by many special interests, and the decision by the Tea Party movement to back only Republican candidates rather than third party candidates.

Welcome back to the reality of America's delusional democracy where career politicians will continue to foster a corrupt, inefficient and dysfunctional government because that is what the two-party plutocracy and its supporters want for their own selfish reasons.

The first priority of all the new members of Congress will, as always, be to get reelected. And most will succeed. For a job with security, great pay, terrific health insurance, and countless perks, with no requirement for prior accomplishments doing the same work, nothing beats becoming a member of the US Congress.

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