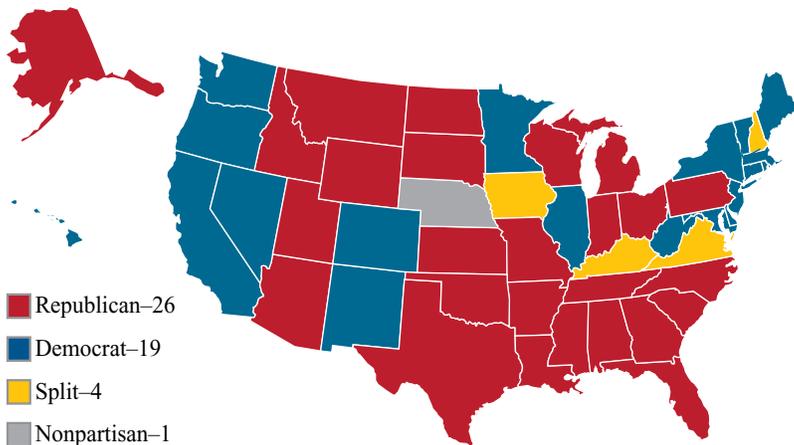


Democrats Bounce Back

Democrats gained back some chambers lost in 2010, but both parties had reasons to be pleased with the election results.



BY TIM STOREY

After getting shellacked by Republicans two years ago, Democrats rebounded in the 2012 election, gaining about 150 seats and taking back eight chambers they lost in 2010. Presidential coattails made a difference, as they often do. Since 1900, the party winning the White House has gained seats in legislatures in 21 of 29 elections.

Republicans scored a few wins as well, including gaining majorities in both chambers of the Arkansas Legislature for the first time since Reconstruction. With Arkansas in their column, Republicans now control every legislature in the former Democratic “solid South” of a mere 20 years ago.

Before and After

After wresting a stunning 24 chambers from the hands of Democrats in the past two years, Republicans entered this election season in control of an historic number of legislatures. The GOP held both legislative chambers in 26 states, Democrats had 15, and eight state legislatures were split, including Virginia because its Senate is tied. It is functionally the GOP’s, however, since the tie-breaker—the lieutenant governor—is Republican. Nebraska is left out of the count because its Legislature is not only unicameral, but also nonpartisan.

Leaders from both parties had reasons to be pleased with the

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results of the elections when 6,034 out of 7,383 seats were up for grabs in the 44 states holding regular elections. Democrats won control of eight chambers (all ones they had lost to Republicans in 2010), while Republicans took over in four. Those changes leave the tally heading into 2013 legislative sessions at 26 GOP state legislatures, 19 Democratic and four split.

In terms of chambers, Republicans control 56, Democrats hold 41, and only the Virginia Senate is tied. A handful of recounts and late ballots could change the final tallies in a couple of chambers with razor-thin differences, including the Arkansas House where Republicans hold a two-seat lead.



Democrats Celebrate Coattails

On average, winning presidents bring in about 200 additional seats. The 150 seats gained by Democrats in November fell a bit short of that average and were not exactly widespread. A net of nearly 120 seats by Democrats in the New Hampshire House alone accounted for most of the gains. New Hampshire's 400-seat House is by far the largest legislative body in the United States.

Democrats gained seats in 38 of the nation's 98 partisan state legislative chambers, while Republicans added seats in 36. In the other chambers, it

was a draw. The net gain in seats for Democrats left them holding 47.5 percent of all partisan legislative seats in the country, with Republicans still claiming a majority, at 52.1 percent. Third party legislators (not counting nonpartisan Nebraskan lawmakers) nudged up slightly to 29, or 0.4 percent of all the nation's legislators.

President Barack Obama's coattails were perhaps no stronger than in New Hampshire where his party made huge gains and pulled off a surprising upset by taking back the Granite State House with a 222 to 178 majority. Republicans also lost seats in

2012 State Elections By the Numbers

6,034

Legislative seats up for grabs
on Nov. 6

12

Legislative chambers that switched
party control

About 150

Seats gained by Democrats

26

States in which Republicans control
both chambers

19

States in which Democrats control
both chambers

25

Chambers in which Republicans hold
2/3 majorities

12

Chambers in which Democrats hold
2/3 majorities

1

Legislative seat added in 2012
(in New York Senate)

7,383

Total state legislators

1,781

Female state legislators
(1,746 before the election)

*Note: These numbers are based on
preliminary data.*

the New Hampshire Senate yet managed to hang on to a much narrower 13 to 11 majority.

New England was fertile ground for Democrats this year. New Hampshire's neighbor, Maine, saw Democrats make their second biggest gains ever, netting more than 20 seats and winning back both chambers—with a 25-seat advantage in the House and nearly a 10-seat majority in the Senate. Maine is one of 15 states with term limits.

Another big win for Democrats was in New York, where they look likely to gain back a majority in the Senate by winning 32 seats compared to 30 for Republicans. At press time, one New York Senate race was still undecided and at least one other was headed for a recount, so it is far from settled. With New York Senate Republican Leader Dean Skelos hinting at a possible



coalition with dissident Democratic senators to maintain Republican control, it could be weeks, if not months, before New Yorkers know who

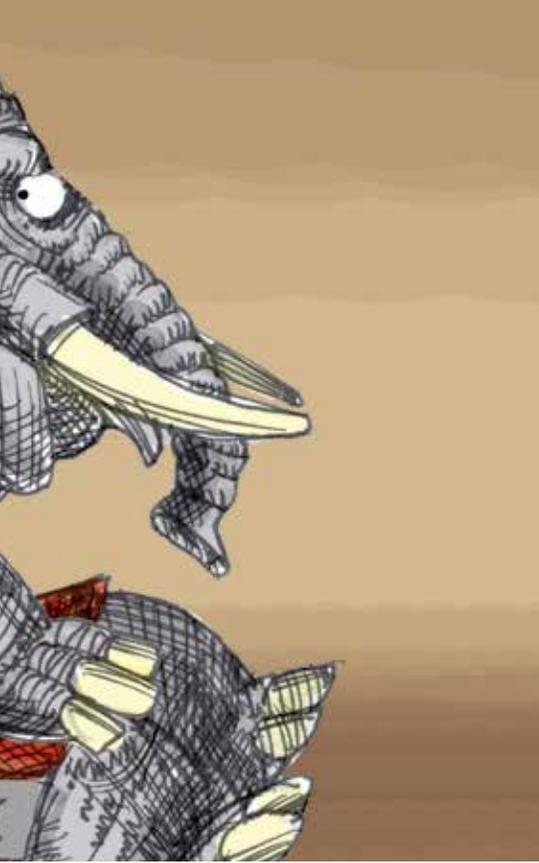
will be in charge in Albany.

Even though the Democrats picked up 32 seats in the Midwest, Minnesota was the only state in the region where Democrats gained chambers, netting 20 seats and retaking majorities they lost in 2010 in both chambers. In the Senate, Democrats, who were down seven seats going into the election were up by nine afterward. In the House, they went from a 10-seat minority to a 12-seat majority.

In Colorado, Democrats needed to win back only one seat to re-gain the House, and they did that easily. Democrats now hold the House, Senate and governorship in the Rocky Mountain state. The Colorado House has changed hands 18 times in the last 112 years, making it one of the most competitive chambers in the country, trailing only the houses in Delaware, Indiana and New Jersey and the Senate in Connecticut, none of which changed hands in this election.

The Oregon Legislative Assembly entered this election as the country's most evenly divided. The House was tied at 30-30, and the Senate had only a two-seat difference. Democrats gained four seats to break the tie in the House and clung to their 16-14 advantage in the Senate to take full control in Oregon.

The Democratic wins in 2012 were the product of old-fashioned retail politics, says Michael Sargeant, executive director of the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, which coordinated many of the Democratic campaigns around the country.



“From Maine to Oregon, Democratic candidates and volunteers spent countless hours talking to their neighbors about their ideas to improve their communities, attract quality jobs, fund education, and build vital infrastructure,” he says.

Republicans Take South

Republicans, however, were far from shut out coming off their biggest election gains in more than 80 years in 2010. The GOP succeeded in taking over four legislative chambers, including the notable feat in Arkansas. Determined to make history, Republicans pulled off a twofer in the Natural State by taking a 22 to 13 majority in the Senate and a 51 to 49 majority in the House.

In the past two years, Republicans have added 113 legislative seats in the South, which has become the most Republican part of the nation, and was the only region of the country where the GOP gained seats in 2012. Twenty years ago Republicans did not hold a single legislative chamber in the South. They now control every one.

Republicans also gained the previously tied Alaska Senate and won back the Wisconsin Senate, which Democrats controlled for only a few months following several recall elections last summer.

Republican party leaders were buoyed by their wins in states even though they lost at the top of the ticket. “While Democrats were able to make gains in some of the bluest states,” says

The Undivided States of America

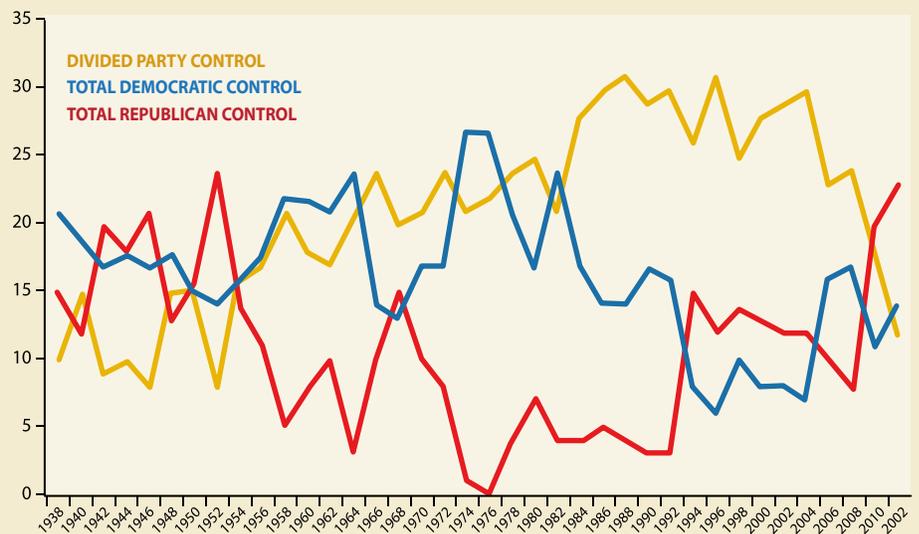
One of the most interesting results from this year’s election was the decline in the number of split legislatures and states with divided party control. There are now only three truly split state legislatures, where neither party has both chambers: Iowa, Kentucky and New Hampshire. That is the lowest number since 1944, when there were also three. To find a year with even fewer, one has to go back to 1928 when there were only two.

When governors are factored in, there are only 12 state governments with divided partisan control. It’s been 50 years since there were this few states with divided government.

The striking decline of split legislatures and divided state governments was puzzling to most observers of state politics. Reid Wilson, editor in chief of National Journal’s Hotline, theorized that Americans’ “voting habits are starting to resemble a parliamentary democracy. We vote for the party instead of the individual, and that’s happening more often—even in races where it didn’t used to be the case, like in legislatures.” At a time when the two parties are at relative parity nationally, it appears that states are becoming more one-sided and increasingly polarized.

One-Party Control of State Government

The number of states with the same party in control of the governorship and both legislative chambers is at the highest level since 1944.



Republican State Leadership Committee President Chris Jankowski, “Republicans defended the majority of chambers we won in 2010, retook the Wisconsin Senate and gained control of the Arkansas House and Senate.”

Time to Govern

The first election following the redrawing of legislative districts always results in a spike in turnover in legislatures, and this year will be no exception. It looks like turnover will be around 30 percent of all seats. That’s on top of the nearly 25 percent turnover rate of 2010. All these new legislators will bring a wealth of new

ideas into the legislative process. That may be just what the country needs as it continues to emerge from the economic doldrums.

Americans have expressed one clear message this year: They’re fed up with gridlock and expect their elected representatives to work together to solve some of the country’s problems. There are plenty of concerns to tackle, from stubbornly high unemployment rates to consistently underperforming schools. Next year’s freshman class of state lawmakers, along with their veteran colleagues, have their work cut out for them.