

## **GOP Weaknesses**

Dr. David Frisk  
*Guest Contributor*

The difficulty in predicting the size of Republican gains next month arises from several factors that seem, thus far, to have shielded the Democrats from the full consequences of Barack Obama's unpopularity. One reflects closely related political truisms: money talks, incumbency is usually an advantage. The fundraising strength of Democratic Senate incumbents and their national campaign committee is predictable; they're incumbents and their party has controlled the upper house for eight years. But other factors that have inhibited a strong Republican wave are longstanding within the GOP and its base—problems for which there is no equivalent, or a much smaller one, among the Democrats. Here as elsewhere, analysts of American politics are often mistaken when tending to assume symmetry between the parties.

Whether Republican gains in the Senate, House and elsewhere are small or larger, they will be lessened by: Democratic advantages in ground-game work; major GOP donors' reluctance, at least until recently, to give as much as they could; and the disaffection many Republican voters and right-leaning independents feel toward the party's leaders and candidates.

The grassroots disparity, a complicated story, owes much to Republican Party culture. Its volunteers, for instance—one detects this especially by reading a variety of media articles over the years that discuss grassroots politics—seem less intensely or less confidently “political,” less willing to engage in real or effective conversations with undecided voters. Or the campaign people don't much ask them to, probably in part for that reason. They're also less likely to know how to address voters in person, since most have less experience in ideological issue advocacy than the relatively large pool of Democratic and left-leaning activists plus union operatives. A school teacher (D) is accustomed to speaking articulately to strangers, if only to kids and parents.

Similarly, he or she is used to nudging people based on real or presumed greater knowledge. A small businessperson or middle manager (R), in contrast, worries about what customers think and doesn't want to tick anyone off. That's fine in personal and professional life, but it can be a serious problem in politics. Additionally, the Republican worker has the same problem as the Republican candidate in a competitive race: promoting to undecided (often also low-information) voters the more abstract conservative or libertarian message rather than the more concrete, simple “progressive” one.

Another sticking point for the Republican ground game is at the managerial level. Whether due to distrust of grassroots activists or for vaguer cultural reasons, party professionals haven't stressed direct voter contact, and especially that slow, anxiety-inducing door-knocking, to the extent their Democratic counterparts have. There remains a bias toward expensive TV ads and direct mail, despite a changing communications climate where voters increasingly block these, literally or psychologically.

One thing the pundits have understood well in this election cycle is the sour attitude toward the GOP among centrist voters despite Obama's own unpopularity. But their continual discussions, and those among Republican professionals, of the party's “brand” have underestimated the negative reactions that would result among current GOP supporters to most tacks the party establishment envisions for winning more votes. Changes like dropping any serious opposition to abortion, pursuing an immigration policy that places the interests of illegal and would-be immigrants or employers first and the general public's second, or even, in deficit control, stressing tax hikes for “the rich” more than spending restraint could all be net political losers. Even the talk about modifying the brand, and the cautious moves in that direction, are evident to ideological Republicans at the grassroots, who mostly don't like it. Combine that with, in particular,

Republican officeholders' general inability over the years to enact conservative or libertarian legislation at the federal level and you get deep frustration.

For such reasons, polling shows that a substantially higher share of voters who identify as Democrats say their party adequately represents their interests and beliefs than is true among Republicans. That goes a long way toward explaining why Republicans—especially in the most uncertain races, where their candidate must either be a moderate or send such signals to undecided voters—cannot count on unified backing from the party's own voters. They might reject these “unprincipled” concessions by staying home, or skipping a race on the ballot. And the problem grows when a third party or high-profile independent candidate is available. In North Carolina, conservatives and right-leaning populists who dislike the GOP have a Libertarian option. He's quite unqualified, and Libertarians never get elected, but that doesn't necessarily matter to voters who crave what political science calls “expressive benefits,” or in plain English blowing off steam. (“I just told the Republicans I quit!”) In Kansas and South Dakota, a non-conservative independent will probably reap some anti-system votes among the most alienated conservatives.

The Republicans will probably win these two races, but an internally stronger GOP wouldn't have to worry about them. The North Carolina outcome is completely uncertain especially because the Republican challenger, as state House speaker, actually delivered on many Republican positions in office—a dangerous business in a closely divided state, especially since the sustained, angry response among liberal activists far exceeded whatever efforts the conservatives made.

So, Democrats: it could be worse on election night, because in key respects the other party doesn't function as well as yours. And Republicans: even if the news is great, your party has major problems to work through.

## **Stop Worrying and Love the Drone**

Andrew Nachemson | *Staff Writer*

In recent years, we have seen the rise of a new form of military technology called drones. With their arrival has come the inevitable response of critics in a self-righteous hurry to condemn drones – more formally known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) – as the newest atrocities of modern warfare. This newfound hatred for drones is not surprising, but it is completely misguided and is only a result of misinformation and fear of what we don't fully understand.

The vast majority of U.S. drone strikes take place in countries that we are not at war with, but that house belligerents with whom we are at war. Al-Qaeda members and their affiliates in Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia are the main targets, and while civilian casualties are a tragic and inevitable part of this aerial campaign, there is no doubt that the targets in these countries are enemy combatants and drone warfare is generally safer than any other kind.

Drone strikes can kill civilians. It would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. But, before we as a country unilaterally dismiss drone strikes as war crimes, let us examine the

alternatives and determine if a better course of action is available. The alternative to aerial strikes would be, of course, ground troops in countries like Pakistan and Somalia. Enemy combatants operate out of those nations, but the idea of sending ground troops to those countries seems objectionable. We've seen the backlash from the Iraq War: the desolation of a country, over a trillion dollars spent by the U.S. government, and countless civilian deaths estimated to exceed 100,000. Ground war brings chaos and with it death and destruction on a colossal level. A drone is also controllable. A drone can't rape. A drone can't lose its mind and go on a murderous rampage. Drone strikes, while still not absolutely precise, are at least contained attacks that do not threaten the very fabric of society.

It seems unlikely that critics of drone strikes are clamoring for troops to be deployed in the aforementioned countries, but what of other aerial strikes committed by piloted planes? The first, and most obvious, reason why drones are preferential to standard piloted planes is the lack of risk for the pilots carrying out the operation. Drones are so effective because they can get into areas that a manned plane could not, and carry out missions that would be deemed suicidal for a pilot to undertake. But, unbiased research also reveals that drone strikes result in fewer civilian deaths than standard bombings. Civilian death rates are extremely difficult to measure and many different sources have come up with various numbers, but even taking the highest estimations, the ratio of civilian deaths to enemy combatant deaths is significantly lower with drone strikes than

manned bombings. There are various reasons for this. First, drones are more capable of scouting out an area before a strike. Their size and unmanned nature means they are much more capable of surveillance and can more accurately determine if there are civilians in the vicinity. Drones also traditionally fire guided missiles that can be aimed at specific targets and even aborted if necessary, as opposed to the unsophisticated blanket bombing techniques used by most manned aircrafts that results in a much larger scale of destruction and death.

Of course, deaths of innocent civilians as a result of drone warfare will contribute to hatred of America and possibly convert new terrorists, but so does every other form of warfare. Fewer innocent lives lost and structural damage done logically suggests less backlash.

The final option is that the United States should not be engaged in war with any of these countries in any capacity, and that's a valid argument to be made, but not one that is particularly relevant when analyzing the pros and cons of drone warfare. We live in a strange point in history where conflicts are ill defined and our nation is at war with organizations and ideologies rather than other nations. As of today, drones are the most effective resource we have for addressing this martial ambiguity and straddling the line between armed conflict and open war. Whether or not you believe we should be engaged in these conflicts has no bearing on the fact that drones are extremely effective, both in terms of killing enemy combatants and reducing the loss of civilian death rates.

## Tea Party on the Decline

Alex Klosner  
Staff Writer

The historic 2010 midterm elections proved to be one of the most successful election years for the GOP. Republicans won six U.S. senate seats, 63 seats in the House of Representatives, six governorships, and 680 seats in state legislatures. Apprehension towards the Affordable Care Act and the overall perception of the Obama Administration gave rise to the Tea Party, the boisterous, right wing faction of the GOP. Establishment Republicans such as Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski and Delaware Congressman Michael Castle lost their primaries to "anti-establishment" Tea Party candidates.

Four years later, public opinion polls and a number of primaries reveal that the Tea Party's political leverage in the Republican Party has withered. In November 2010, 61% of Republicans supported the Tea Party. According to a recent Gallup poll, Tea Party support among Republican voters has fallen to 41%.

Michelle Bachmann (R-MN), founder of the House Tea Party Caucus asserted in the 2011 Tea Party response to President Obama's State of the Union Address that the Tea Party is a "dynamic force for good in our national conversation." More recently, Bachmann spoke at the 2014 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) and said that the Tea Party "at its core is an intellectual movement."

However, Tea Party Republicans have not lived up to Bachmann's evaluation. In fact, Republicans that identify with the Tea Party have burdened the GOP and cost it a number of winnable Senate seats. In 2010, Tea Party-backed Christine O'Donnell defeated Congressman

Michael Castle ('61 Hamilton alumnus) in the Republican primary for a Delaware U.S. Senate seat. In the general election, Democrat Chris Coons defeated O'Donnell 57% to 40%. Most political analysts believe that moderate Castle would have defeated Coons had he been the nominee. In 2012, analysts believed Tea Party favorite Todd Akin could defeat Democrat Claire McCaskill in the right-leaning state of Missouri. But after Akin made an abhorrent comment on abortion, the tides turned and McCaskill retained her Senate seat.

This past June, many GOP incumbents became concerned after Tea Party challenger David Brat defeated house majority leader Eric Cantor. Despite Cantor's defeat, a number of Republican voters have demonstrated waning support for the Tea Party. Senators Lindsay Graham (R-SC), Pat Roberts (R-KS), John Cornyn (R-TX), Thad Cochran (R-MI), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and most notably Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) have all defeated anti-establishment Tea Party candidates in their respective primaries.

Flawed Tea Party nominees would make it almost impossible for Republicans to win the Senate next month. Fortunately, the increasing irrelevance of the Tea Party has bolstered the likelihood of Republicans taking control of the Senate. To their dismay, Democrats know that they may lose the Senate and Nancy Pelosi's recent assertion that "civilization as we know it today would be in jeopardy if the Republicans win the Senate" demonstrates a sense of desperation among the Democratic leadership.

A congressional primary right here in Central New York's 22nd congressional district showcased a battle between a moderate incumbent Republican and a far-right challenger. Incumbent

Congressman Richard Hanna faced a challenge from New York State Assemblywoman Claudia Tenney (R-New Hartford). Tenney portrayed herself as the true conservative candidate and received endorsements from commentators such as Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham. Tenney's voting record proves that she is indeed one of the most fiscally and socially conservative members of the New York State Assembly. Hanna, a strong fiscal conservative, tilts left on a number of social issues. On June 24th, Hanna defeated Tenney 53%-47%. These past few years, Hanna's transparency, practicality, and willingness to reach across the aisle have made him an effective legislator.

The Tea Party weakens the Republican Party. Chairman of the Ohio Republican Party Matt Borges emphasized that Republicans "can't expect to win if we are fighting against each other all the time." A complete dissolution of the counterproductive faction is not far off. Good riddance.

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