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The **Democratic Strategist** is a web-based publication edited by three leading American political strategists and thinkers—political theorist William Galston, polling expert Stan Greenberg and political demographer Ruy Teixeira. It seeks to provide a forum and meeting ground for the serious, data-based discussion of Democratic political strategy.

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THE
DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST
WHITE PAPER

**PLANNING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRATIC
VICTORY IN 2010 –
SETTING INITIAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

BY ED KILGORE

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A TDS STRATEGY WHITE PAPER:

Planning Ahead for Democratic Victory in 2010— Setting Initial Goals and Objectives

By Ed Kilgore

Although little more than a month has passed since the 2008 elections, Democrats are already beginning to look ahead to 2010.

For Democrats to continue their recent run of success, however, it is necessary that they do more than passively examine and evaluate the contests that lie in the future.

Concrete goals and objectives for 2010 need to be defined and specific plans developed for how these goals can be achieved. Limited resources have to be allocated and priorities established.

As a first step in this process, this TDS Strategy White Paper reviews the upcoming Senate, House and State-level elections in order to define a set of initial goals and objectives. A series of initial priority races are listed and a set of concrete objectives are defined.

This initial set of goals and objectives will need to be updated as more information becomes available. Democrats should begin now, however, to evaluate and define targeted, specific strategies for achieving these initial objectives. The Democratic Strategist will seek to publish and circulate strategic analyses of this kind as widely as possible.

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I. The 2010 Battleground Map:

If you combine all the factors discussed in the attached analysis—competitive Senate and House races, redistricting opportunities, and gubernatorial/state legislative chamber contests, the following states look like key battlegrounds for Democrats in 2010:

- California: potentially competitive Senate race (Boxer seat); competitive governor's race (Schwarzenegger term-limited); at least four competitive House races.
- Florida: competitive Senate race (open Martinez seat); opportunity to disrupt Republican control of redistricting by winning governorship with two new House seats at stake; 1-3 competitive House races.

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- Illinois: potentially competitive Senate race (Obama seat); competitive Governor's race (possible Blagojevich re-elect bid); opportunity to control redistricting with one-seat House loss likely; 1-3 competitive House races.
 - Michigan: Open governor's seat; opportunity to control redistricting with one-seat House loss likely; 2-3 competitive House races.
 - Nevada: potentially competitive Senate race (Reid seat); opportunity to control redistricting with one new House seat at stake; 1-2 competitive House races.
 - New York: potentially competitive governor's race; opportunity to control redistricting with two-seat House loss likely; 3 competitive House races.
 - Ohio: competitive Senate race (Voinovich seat); opportunity to control redistricting with two-seat House loss likely; 1-3 competitive House races.
 - Pennsylvania: Open governor's seat; competitive Senate race (Specter seat); opportunity to control redistricting one one-seat House loss likely; 1-2 competitive House races.
 - Texas: opportunity to disrupt Republican control of redistricting with three new House seats at stake; 1-3 competitive House races.

Obviously, this is a very preliminary and subjective list. The number of competitive House races will almost certainly rise and change over time; there are a number of potentially competitive Senate races in other states; and retirements will affect both. Moreover, redistricting-related opportunities and challenges will congeal between now and 2010. And different party organizations will have different maps. But it's important that Democrats begin thinking of the 2010 "map," as opposed to the 2008 map, in a comprehensive way.

II. Overall Goals and Objectives for Democrats in 2010

Some important goals for Democrats in 2010 have nothing to do with individual contests, but everything to do with the overall political climate.

- The 2006-2008 Democratic gains were accompanied by the first overall Democratic financial advantage in decades. It is a realistic and important goal to maintain and expand the Democratic financing advantage in the congressional, gubernatorial, and state legislative party committees, and establish a financial advantage in the national party. This goal should if at all possible be accomplished through continued cultivation and expansion of the small-donor base created by the Obama campaign and other internet-based fundraising vehicles, including those associated with "netroots" organizations. The small-donor revolution has not yet permeated congressional and state campaigns; it can and should by 2010.
- Through the combined efforts of the DNC, the Obama campaign, and an assortment of state-based activists, long-moribund state and local party in

frastructures experienced a renaissance during the last two election cycles. For 2010, Democrats must continue to build a robust and permanent nationwide Democratic field organization that includes long-range deployment around the country of professionally trained and nationally financed field staff. At this time it is not clear how the Obama campaign intends to coordinate the extensive field organization developed by the campaign itself with the permanent Democratic Party organization. If the Obama campaign organization is not folded into the national and state party infrastructure, means of regular cooperation on the ground must be worked out in detail.

- Democrats also need to build on some of the demographic breakthroughs achieved in 2008. In terms of consolidating support that is especially significant for the future, key Goals for 2010 should include winning more than 60% of the Latino vote and of the under-30 vote; and a majority of the under-30 white non-college educated vote.

In terms of individual contests, the following goals appear achievable. (Note: in terms of early 2010 handicapping, [the series currently underway at DailyKos](#) is especially useful, as is the initial analysis supplied by the [Cook Political Report](#).)

- Given the unusually positive Senate landscape in this cycle, Democrats should set as a goal a net gain of three U.S. Senate seats. That number should be adjusted as retirements on both sides of the aisle and candidate recruitment opportunities develop.
- The U.S. House is more problematic at present. Additional Democrats gains in the first mid-term elections after a party change of government, and after two straight cycles with strong gains, would represent an accomplishment never achieved by either party since 1934. A more realistic goal would be to hold U.S. House losses to less than 10 seats, which would maintain a robust House majority.
- State gubernatorial and legislative races could be particularly problematic for Democrats in 2010, particularly in states where Democrats will be completely responsible for state government during the next two difficult years. Yet the long-term viability of the party, and short-term redistricting objectives, depend on the best possible results. Since no party governing the White House has ever, in living memory, made net gains in state legislative chambers in a midterm election, the goal should be to avoid losses in legislative chambers that affect overall party control of a state, and/or affect key congressional redistricting opportunities. It's certainly realistic to maintain the Democratic majority in total state legislative seats, and in the number of chambers controlled.
- In gubernatorial races, the upcoming fiscal crises, and the vast number of term-limited incumbents, make any projections exceedingly difficult. Democrats should certainly be able to maintain their current majority of governorships, defeat or replace a majority of the eight Republican governors in states carried by Barack Obama , and consolidate some of the 2008

Democratic gains in the Northeast, Midwest, the Rocky Mountains, and the Border South.

III. Background and Analysis:

Prospects and Goals for the Democrats In 2010

The “reaction versus realignment” debate over the implications of this year’s Democratic victory continues to percolate through the mainstream media and the blogosphere. For the record, I agree with **Paul Starr’s assessment** that it represents a “realignment opportunity” that could either succeed, fail, or hang in suspended animation, depending in no small part on the Obama administration’s governing ability (in conjunction with a Democratic Congress).

But in any event, those on all sides of the debate over the future of the Democratic Party may soon have a powerful data point to cite: the results of the 2010 midterm elections.

Since the Obama administration will be the first Democratic administration since Bill Clinton’s, the 1994 Republican landslide is naturally casting a shadow over current events, particularly among Republicans who are taking solace in the possibility of a quick recovery from the 2006 and 2008 elections. There are a variety of reasons for believing that 1994 was a unique event: it occurred after Bill Clinton won only 42% of the popular vote; it reflected pent-up anti-status-quo sentiment aimed at a Congress that had been controlled by Democrats (with the exception of six years of Republican Senate control in the 1980s) for forty years; it was fed by an unusually large wave of Democratic retirements; and it was expanded by a historic ideological realignment of the South, exacerbated by racial gerrymandering.

Still, economic conditions and high “wrong track” sentiment after the 1992 elections bear enough resemblance to the situation today to make 1994 a cautionary lesson for Democrats. With that in mind, what does the lay of the land look like for 2010?

Congressional Elections—Relevant History

First of all, it’s helpful to look at some history beyond 1994. Since FDR took office, there have been eight midterm elections immediately after a change of party administration in the White House. The incumbent White House party lost significantly, in descending order of the damage, in 1994 (Democrats lost 52 House seats and 8 Senate seats); in 1982 (Republicans lost 26 House seats but gained 1 Senate seat); 1954 (Republicans lost 18 House seats and 1 Senate seat); 1978 (Democrats lost 15 house seats and 3 Senate seats); and 1970 (Republicans lost 12 House seats but gained 2 Senate seats). In two midterms, the incumbent White House party made notable gains: in 1934 (Democrats won 9 House seats and 9 Senate seats) and in 2002 (Republicans won 8 House seats and 2 Senate seats). In 1962, the parties roughly broke even (Democrats lost 4 House seats but gained 3 Senate seats).

In only two of these midterm elections was the incumbent White House party emerging from two consecutive strong congressional election cycles, as Democrats will in 2010: in 1934, after two enormous congressional landslides in 1930 and 1932, when Democrats made significant (if much smaller) gains for a third cycle; and in 1982, when Republicans lost ground after strong outings in 1978 and 1980.

Totally aside from party control of the White House or the particular timing of a cycle, a party has made gains in both Houses of Congress in three consecutive elections exactly once since FDR took office: in 1936, when Democrats won additional seats for the fourth consecutive cycle.

Prospects—Congressional Elections

This last fact makes sense if only because success in congressional elections, especially in the House, breeds danger: the more competitive seats you win, the more vulnerable seats you must defend in the next election, and the less “low-hanging fruit” is available on the other side of the partisan divide. If there is indeed a built-in “backlash” factor against Democrats as the incumbent White House party in 2010, the difficulty of winning a third straight congressional cycle will obviously be compounded.

A very preliminary analysis of the landscape for House races in 2010 shows a muddled situation. Excluding the four races still unresolved from this election, 57 House members won by less than 55% of the vote—the traditional threshold for potential vulnerability. Of those 32 are Republicans and 25 are Democrats. The first Cook Political Report ratings for 2010, however, paint a different picture: of 29 districts already deemed competitive, 20 are now held by Democrats.

At present, however, Democrats hold a 38-seat majority in the House, a number that could rise when the four unresolved races are sorted out. It would require a Republican landslide on the order of 1994 (a 52-seat gain)—an event which, as noted above, would be difficult to replicate—to retake control. To put it another way, a reversal of the 2006 Democratic “wave” (a 30-seat gain) wouldn’t suffice.

In the Senate, Democrats are very lucky that they hold only 16 of the 35 seats up in 2010. The first Cook Political Report analysis of the 2010 cycle rates retention of all 16 Democratic seats as “solid” or “likely,” while all four of the initially competitive races are in seats currently held by Republicans (Vitter of LA, Bunning of KY, Martinez of FL and Specter of PA). Democratic control of the Senate in 2011 is as safe as anything in politics could ever be.

Retirements could change the picture in both the House and (particularly) the Senate. Republican Senators Specter (80 years old), Bunning (79) and Voinovich (74) all face potentially tough races and are strong candidates for retirement.

State Elections—Relevant History

The 2010 battle for control of state legislative chambers and governorships is significant for the obvious reasons of short-term policy results and long-term party-building prospects. But it's also important as the last election before the decennial reapportionment and redistricting process, which will help determine not only future control of state legislatures, but the U.S. House landscape for the next decade.

Historically, there's been a very high correlation between midterm election gains and losses in control of state legislative chambers, and control of the White House. In every midterm election going back to 1942, the party controlling the White House has registered a net loss in state legislative chambers controlled, with the sole exception of 1998, when Democrats picked up one net chamber.

Gubernatorial elections have followed this pattern, but not as rigorously: in 1986, a very good year for congressional Democrats (who regained control of the U.S. Senate), Democrats had a net loss of 7 governorships.

Beneath the net numbers, there's often a significant amount of churn in gubernatorial elections, often due to distinct intrastate incumbent/challenger cycles. In 2002, for example (a year characterized by severe state budget crises), Democrats won eleven Republican-held governorships, but Republicans won nine Democratic-held governorships. Similarly, if less dramatically, in 1998 each party won four governorships held by the other party. In general, gubernatorial incumbents and their party-designated successors have exhibited much less electoral power than congressional incumbents, year in and year out, and term limits have become an extremely important factor in both gubernatorial and state legislative elections.

State Elections—Prospects

Democrats now control 60 of the nation's 98 state legislative chambers. In (by my rough count) 24 chambers, the margin of partisan control in either direction is narrow enough that it could change in a national or state "wave" election.

Currently Democrats hold 28 governorships and Republicans hold 22; of the 36 states with gubernatorial elections in 2010, 19 are currently held by Democrats and 17 by Republicans. But in those 36 states, ten Democratic and eight Republican governors are term-limited (at least two of the Democrats, Janet Napolitano of AZ and Bill Richardson of NM, will resign their seats if confirmed for positions in the Obama administration). 6 of the 19 Democratic-held seats are in states carried by McCain, and Barack Obama, and 8 of the 17 Republican-held seats are in states carried by Obama. In other words, this is a very fluid landscape.

But the key thing to keep in mind about 2010 state elections is the extraordinarily difficult fiscal situation facing every state over the next two years; virtually all states are facing a budget crisis that ranges from "serious" to "catastrophic." A robust federal stimulus

package may mitigate the damage, but The political implications of these crises vary state-by-state, of course, but the main variable is that parties holding complete control of state governments will (a) have a relatively easier time imposing “solutions,” but (b) may well suffer disproportionately from the unpopularity of budget and services cuts and/or tax increases.

At present, Democrats control the governorship and the legislature in 17 states, while Republicans have complete control in 10 states (22 states have divided party control, and one, Nebraska, has a nonpartisan legislature). If Janet Napolitano is confirmed as US Secretary of Homeland Security, Republicans will gain complete control in AZ as well.

In terms of the upcoming redistricting process, there are six states (CA, CT, HI, RI, NV, and MN) where a gubernatorial victory would likely give Democrats complete control of state government, and four (KS, OK, TN, and WY) where the same is true for Republicans. In six states (AL, AZ, FL, GA, ID, UT) a Democratic gubernatorial takeover would disrupt what would otherwise almost certainly be complete Republican control of state government. That’s the case for Republicans in seven states (AR, CO, IL, IA, MD, MA and NM).

There are three states (MI, OH, and PA) where a realistically feasible legislative chamber victory could (if nothing else changes) give Democrats complete control of state government; the same is true for Republicans in two states (AK and IN). Meanwhile, there are four states (AK, ND, OK, TX) where a feasible Democratic legislative chamber victory could disrupt completely Republican control of state governments, and five states (ME, NH, NY, OR, and WI) where Republicans have the same opportunity.

Add all this up, and eliminate the single-district states where congressional reapportionment is irrelevant, and the four states (AZ, CA, IA and ME) where the governor and legislature have no direct role in redistricting, and there are fully 29 states (AL, CO, CT, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, KS, MD, MA, MI, MN, NV, NH, NM, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VT, and WI) where the election results of 2010 could affect congressional redistricting.

Among these states, TX is expected to gain three U.S. House seats after reapportionment; FL should gain two; GA and UT should gain one. NY and OH are expected to lose two; IL, MI and PA should lose one.

IV. Conclusion

Ultimately, of course, Democratic governance, in Washington, and around the country, will have at least as much of an effect on Democratic performance in 2010 as any set of strategic goals, however well thought out and pursued. And it's too early to tell if the positive results of the 2006 and 2008 campaigns strengthened or accelerated favorable demographic trends that will be resistant to political adversity. With George W. Bush and Republican control of Congress finally gone, however, and with the full burdens of governing on the shoulders of Democrats, nothing will come easily. We won't have the option of subsuming our strategic shortcomings or disagreements under a simple message urging rejection of the status quo. It's time for Democrats to think strategically, and give the 2010 elections the extraordinary efforts they will demand.