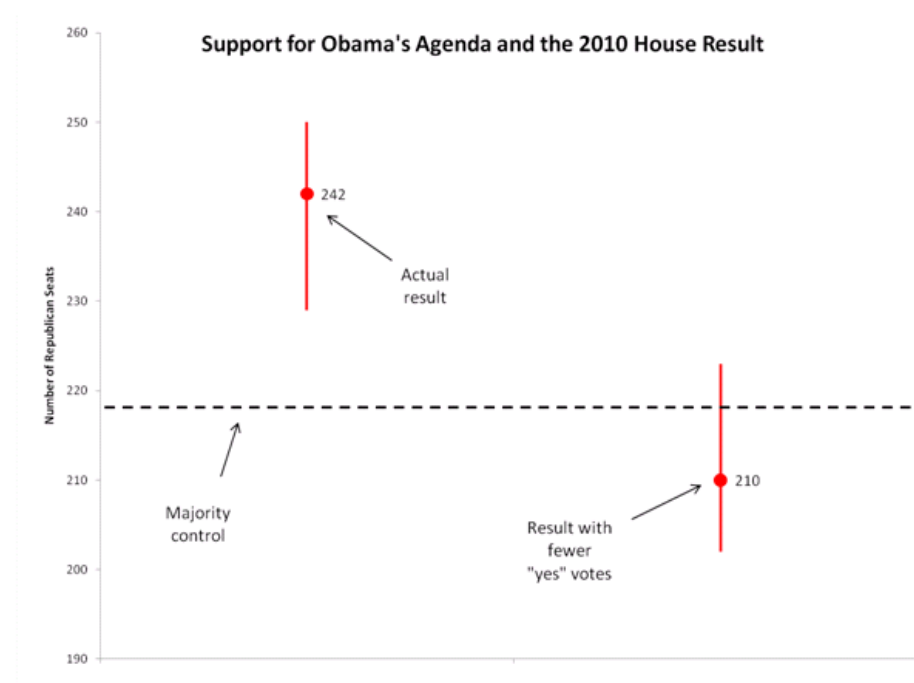


Polling News & Notes

Overlooked Recent Polling and Insights • November 11, 2010

Unpopular Votes Likely Cost Democrats the House: After last week's massive electoral defeats for Democrats, many political pundits claimed the incumbent president's party [always fares poorly](#) in a midterm election, or that the [weak economy](#) was responsible for Democratic losses. Undoubtedly both of these factors played a role in voters' rebuke of Democrats, but [new research](#) from Eric McGhee, a research fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, has shown that Democrats' unpopular votes on major legislation may have cost them 32 House seats.

McGhee's regression compared Democrats who voted for four unpopular bills—TARP, the stimulus bill, health care reform, and cap-and-trade—to those who voted against, while controlling for each district's partisan balance as measured by its 2008 House and presidential vote result and 2010 campaign spending. The result was that on average Democratic incumbents lost 2/3 of a percentage point of vote share for each "yes" vote on an unpopular piece of legislation, and for Democrats in more moderate districts (like Chet Edwards in Texas or Gene Taylor in Mississippi), the impact was as high as 4 percentage points per unpopular vote. As the chart below shows, the model predicts that Republicans would only have won 210 House seats, rather than the 242 they did win, if House Democrats had avoided voting for unpopular legislation.



It may seem elementary to declare that legislative actions matter, but McGhee's model shows the electorate pays attention when their representatives vote for unpopular legislation—and punish them accordingly. House Democrats looking to cast blame may need to look no further than their own votes for the source of last week's losses.

###