



1994 Party Leadership Survey

1994 Congressional Election: The Success of the Republicans

This is a report on our study of the 1994 Congressional election. We hope you find it of interest. Our ability to understand the remarkable nature of the 1994 election and its aftermath is greatly enhanced by the willingness of our respondents to participate in our study. Future reports will emphasize other aspects of the research.

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The 1994 Congressional election was an historic victory for the Republican Party. For the first time in over 40 years the Republicans hold a majority of seats in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. This victory even surprised Republican stalwarts, many of whom predicted gains, but balked at predicting a Republican House majority. The success of the Republicans in 1994 was based on their success with Republican and independent voters. While Democrats in the electorate actually increased their support for Democratic congressional candidates slightly between 1992 and 1994, both independents and Republicans moved strongly to the Republican side. Most impressive, the votes of Ross Perot supporters which were evenly split in the 1992 House elections, showed a two-to-one Republican majority in 1994. This change alone accounted for the majority of the net Republican gain in 1994.

Although the Perot voter remains of interest and enormous importance, those mobilized into activity by Ross Perot's call to involvement provide important insight into the Perot movement and its direction. As part of our study of American elections, we surveyed a sample of individuals in 1992 who were predisposed to support Ross Perot's independent campaign. Many of these individuals were part of the army of activists that succeeded in getting Perot on the ballot in all fifty states and who will influence the process of partisan change in the years ahead. This activist base has not always mirrored the Perot voter. For example, whereas the 19% of the electorate who voted for Perot were evenly divided between Clinton and Bush as their second

choice (in 1992 exit polls), Perot activists in our survey tilted heavily towards Clinton. Those individuals who had been active for Perot in 1992 before he dropped out in July of 1992 preferred Clinton to Bush by almost two to one

(65% vs 36%), and even those callers who actually voted for Perot (55% of the sample) preferred Clinton to Bush by better than a 60-40 margin.

What did these individuals do in 1994? Was their mobilization into the Perot campaign an anomaly, or was their involvement the harbinger of future involvement? Would they merely vote in 1994 to express their opinions (and their displeasure with certain candidates) or would they mobilize in a positive sense for their preferred candidate? Were their votes and activity given disproportionately to either party?

Perot Supporters

Our survey of Perot supporters clearly shows that they were quite involved in partisan campaigns in 1994, and that they helped produce the Republican victory, not only with their votes, but also by their campaign activity. In 1992, campaign activity by individuals in our Perot survey focused heavily on the Presidential level, and specifically on supporting Ross Perot. Ninety percent were active in one of the three general election campaigns or in Perot's spring campaign and about 80% of these were active for Perot.

In 1994 with Perot not on the ballot, and with both parties trying to appeal to Perot voters and activists (particularly through the Republicans' "Contract with America"), the involvement of these Perot activists was vigorously sought by both parties. Partly as a result of the appeals the parties made to Perot supporters from 1992, activity at the Congressional level increased substantially in 1994 (that there is some increase is not surprising, since in the absence of a presidential race focus and energy shift to the Congressional level). While only about one in five Perot callers had any involvement on behalf of partisan House candidates in 1988 and 1992 almost half were involved in 1994. Equally interesting, particularly in light of Ross Perot's call to "Give the Republicans a chance," was the disproportionately Republican nature of this shift. Whereas in both 1992 and 1988 activity and vote were almost evenly divided between Democratic and Republican support (actually leaning towards the Democrats), in 1994 it swung heavily to the Republicans as Table 1 shows. While activity for the Democrats almost doubled, it tripled for the Republicans. This result is even more surprising since the activity level on behalf of Clinton in 1992 far surpassed activity on behalf of Bush.

But Republican activity in 1994 was not limited to the House races alone. It extended to gubernatorial and Senatorial elections as well. In each case, about 30% of the Perot sample was active for the Republican candidate, and about 20% for the Democrat. Combining activity for House, Senate and gubernatorial races, almost half of the sample was active for Republican candidates and more than half of these were active in two or

Table 1:
Levels of House Campaign Activity for Perot Sample, 1988-94

	% Active Democratic Candidate	% Active Republican Candidate	% Active Dem or Repub Candidate	% Voting Dem
1988	12%	11%	19%	—
1992	12%	10%	19%	54%
1994	21%	31%	49%	37%

more campaigns. Democratic activity, while significant, trailed Republican activity substantially: only about one in six were active on behalf of two or more Democrats.

What were the sources for this increased Republican activity in the Perot sample? It came strongly from the most typical Perot activists, those who were active for Perot in 1992 before he dropped out, 1992 Perot voters and partisan independents. While Perot voters among our Perot activist sample increased their activity level for House Democrats by less than 10% between 1992 and 1994, they increased their Republican House activity level by almost 30%. Among independents the increase in Democratic activity was only 7% versus a 27% increase in Republican activity. Similarly the increase in Republican vote came strongly from Perot voters who shifted from an even split between the parties in 1992 to a three-to-one Republican majority in 1994.

In our Perot sample, the Democrats' problem was not only holding its own with the less partisan Perot activists from 1992. An additional problem for the Democrats was that they were also less successful at holding onto their 1992 House campaign activist base than were

the Republicans. Among individuals who had been active in 1992 for Democratic House candidates, only about half remained active in 1994, while the Republicans held onto fully three-quarters of their supporters. In fact among individuals who were active for the Democratic House candidate in 1992, less than 60% even voted Democratic in the 1994 House elections, in contrast to the almost 90% of 1992 Republican House activists who voted Republican in the 1994 elections. Only a bare majority of 1992 House Democratic voters supported the same party with their votes in 1994 while over 80% of 1992 Republican voters did so.

Thus far, we have focused on the role of activism among our Perot sample. Here we find large increases in activity for both parties, but a disproportionate increase in favor of the Republicans. If the Democrats did less well than Republicans among the Perot bloc of activists in 1994, we might wonder how they did among their traditional activist base. In 1992 we surveyed a sample of Democratic and Republican caucus participants. In 1994 we resurveyed the same group. These individuals are an obvious pool for campaign activism, and in fact showed similar levels of involvement in the 1992 Presidential election to the Perot sample.

If the Democrats' loss in 1994 can be traced to a loss among this traditional base, we should be able to see it by comparing 1992 and 1994 House activity. However, the results show that while both parties increased their level of congressional election activity, there is no difference in the increase for the two parties as Table 2 shows. Even the vote totals for the parties remain almost constant over the two year period. Clearly then the Republican gains (either in votes or campaign activism) did not come from conversions among traditional party activists. Rather a significant part of the shift to the Republicans came from the voters and activists typical of the 1992 Perot movement.

As we enter the 1996 presidential election season, the question is clear: how will this swing group of activists respond to the country's new experience of divided government with a Republican congress (which they heavily supported over its major party opposition in 1994) and a Democratic president (whom they strongly preferred over his major party opposition in 1992)? The attendance of representatives from both parties at the United We Stand issues forum in August, and the responses of both parties to the announcement of the formation of a third party by Perot indicate their awareness of and responsiveness to this group.

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**Table 2:
Levels of Congressional Activity for 1992 Democratic and Republican Party Caucus Participants**

	Democratic Caucus Participants		Republican Caucus Participants	
	% Active for Democratic Candidate	% Voting Dem	% Active for Republican Candidate	% Voting Rep
1992	26%	92%	38%	96%
1994	71%	90%	81%	94%

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