

The San Diego  
**Union-Tribune.**

## **2 reasons Democrats should fear a 2022 House wipeout**

Chris Reed

May 6, 2021

The Republican Party is perceived as being in disarray by many high-profile pundits, some of whom believe that the GOP needs to leave former President Donald Trump behind if it wants to regain power in Washington, D.C. An April 9 [analysis](#) by Jonathan Martin and Nicholas Fandos of The New York Times had this headline: “How a Defeated Trump Is Making a Muddle of the GOP.” Martin and Fando wrote that GOP leaders were confused over what their party stood for and called Trump’s continued influence over issues trumpeted by Republicans a “bizarre turn of events.”

But with or without Trump’s help or influence, it won’t be “bizarre” at all for the GOP to surge in 2022, for two strong reasons.

The first has to do with the advantages Republicans will have in redistricting House seats.

The states that will gain House seats in 2022 because of the census were mostly ones that lean GOP and backed Trump in November (including Texas, the only state to pick up two seats, Florida, North Carolina and Montana). The states losing House seats were mostly Democratic or lean Democratic and backed Joe Biden (including California, New York and Illinois).

One might see these facts as resulting in marginal changes in the House, where Democrats now have a 218-212 edge, with five seats vacant. But a 538.com [analysis](#) shows that Republicans have full partisan control over redistricting in states with 187 seats. Democrats have such control over 75 seats. There are 167 House seats in states that have nonpartisan commissions draw boundaries (like California) or which have divided political control over the redistricting process. Six states have only one House seat, so no redistricting is needed (or possible).

There is always going to be mischief in partisan redistricting, but a 2019 U.S. Supreme Court decision could make what happens this election cycle the [most egregious example of partisanship yet](#). In a 5-4 decision that reversed decades of precedents, Chief Justice John Roberts declared that federal judges “have no license to reallocate political power between the two major political parties, with no plausible grant of authority in the Constitution, and no legal standards to limit and direct their decisions.” As long as a state’s House districts have very close to the same population, partisans can gerrymander like crazy.

The second reason a GOP surge is likely is even stronger than the first: In the House election that comes two years after a new president is elected, the party in control of the White House has a long history of losing many seats. Swing voters who backed the new president consistently turn on his party after being disappointed by him.

This didn't happen to Republicans in 2002 because George W. Bush's response to 9/11 still remained popular.

Don't even talk to me until I've had my coffee! When I first heard about the Keurig coffee maker, I was thrilled. Keep your Keurig stocked with delicious, gourmet flavors - delivered to your door!

But in 1994, two years after Bill Clinton's election, Democrats lost 54 seats, and Georgia Republican Newt Gingrich became speaker. Anger over attempts by Clinton and his wife Hilary to fundamentally change health care was widely blamed.

In 2010, two years after Barack Obama's election, Democrats lost 64 seats, and Ohio Republican John Boehner became speaker. Anger over the adoption of the Affordable Care Act was widely blamed.

In 2018, two years after Trump's election, Republicans lost 41 seats, and San Francisco Democrat Nancy Pelosi once again became speaker. Anger over Trump's behavior and contempt for democratic norms were widely blamed.

Is there evidence that swing voters have begun to turn on Biden nearly four months into his presidency? You betcha.

On immigration, college-educated voters, very much including me, generally support increased legal immigration, a path to citizenship for those in the U.S. without documentation (starting with "Dreamers") and humane treatment of migrant children. But years of polling show most moderates and conservatives don't agree. A poll released April 27 by the Cato Institute found that 68 percent of Americans want a "low level" of immigration and 9 percent want no immigration at all.

Coverage of dramatic changes at the border since Trump left office has lessened of late. But The Washington Post recently reported that unauthorized crossings from Mexico into the U.S. were near 20-year highs in March and April — and the public has noticed. AP's April 5 story about its poll on views of Biden carried this headline: "Border woes dent Biden approval on immigration." That poll found 53 percent of those surveyed said better security at the border should be a high priority and 32 percent said it should be a moderate priority. In his March 27 analysis of a CNN poll, CNN's Harry Entenn wrote that public apprehension over immigration puts Biden "between a rock and a hard place. It's not clear looking at the data how to politically deal with the issue." How can Biden possibly finesse the differences between his immigration-supporting progressive base and much of America?

Obama memorably called Democrats' 2010 House wipeout a "shellacking." Between gerrymandering and what history tells us, America appears 18 months away from an encore.