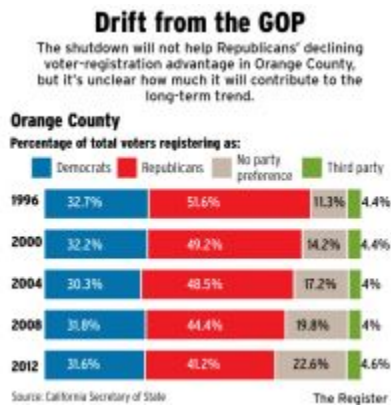


“There was a time when a responsible Republican could say, ‘I’m not one of those crazy Republicans,’” said Dan Jacobson, chairman of the Democratic Foundation of Orange County. “That time has apparently passed. The crazy Republicans are in charge. So when you run for Assembly or city council and you identify yourself as a Republican, you’ll be seen as part of a party that’s gone off the rails.”

Shutdown aftershocks might hurt county GOP

From Sunday 10/20/13’s *Orange County Register* 10/17/13



GRAPHIC: Drifting away CHART: Voter registration by party affiliation in O.C.

By **MARTIN WISCKOL** / ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Some Orange County Democrats are eagerly eyeing the hurt that the 16-day government shutdown will cause Republicans in the 2014 elections and in the trend of the county GOP’s shrinking advantage in voter registration.



Dan Jacobson, chairman of the Democratic



Scott Baugh, chairman of the Republican Party of Orange County



Raphael Sonenshein, executive director of the Pat Brown Institute of Public Affairs at Cal State Los Angeles

But those Democrats might be smart to not count their chickens yet. Still ahead lie a budget battle and another debt-ceiling debate.

Congressional Republicans are widely seen as having forced the shutdown without providing a practical alternative. But they have the chance to leave that loss behind by bridging the gap between the Tea Party and moderate factions, and proving themselves more effective in upcoming battles.

“This is a crackup that had to happen, but it may prove helpful for Republicans if it becomes something that changes the balance of power within the party,” said Raphael Sonenshein, executive director of Cal State Los Angeles’ Pat Brown Institute of Public Affairs. “But the Republicans have a lot of work to do, or this will become a calamity that continues.”

While Orange County is a renowned Republican stronghold, sweeping nationwide trends can have an impact. The popularity of John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign and the disgrace of Watergate provided the county with its two most recent moments of having more Democrats than

Republicans. But both instances were fleeting, with Republicans quickly regaining a sizable advantage.

More significant is the slow, steady erosion of that GOP advantage since it peaked at 22 percentage points in 1990 before sliding to its current edge of just under 10 points. Policy positions related to immigrants in the country illegally have made it particularly difficult for the party among the growing Latino and Asian electorate, but other dings in the Republican brand – such as the shutdown – further buoy Democrats' hopes.

"There was a time when a responsible Republican could say, 'I'm not one of those crazy Republicans,'" said Dan Jacobson, chairman of the Democratic Foundation of Orange County. "That time has apparently passed. The crazy Republicans are in charge. So when you run for Assembly or city council and you identify yourself as a Republican, you'll be seen as part of a party that's gone off the rails."

The county's congressional seats appear safe for their incumbents. The one open House seat – being vacated by a retiring John Campbell – is expected to remain in Republican control thanks to the 16-point GOP advantage in the district.

But Sonenshein, who taught political science at Cal State Fullerton for 30 years, said that if Republicans don't become more effective in Congress, the negative aftershocks of the shutdown may well trickle down to non-congressional races. That could become especially critical in two state legislative races.

With state Sen. Lou Correa, D-Santa Ana, termed out, and the newly drawn district competitive between the two parties, the California GOP has flagged the matchup between Republican county Supervisor Janet Nguyen and Democratic former Assemblyman Jose Solorio as its best shot at winning a new Senate seat.

In the Assembly, freshman Sharon Quirk-Silva, D-Fullerton, is facing a strong challenge from Republican congressional aide Young Kim. The parties are neck-and-neck in that district's voter registration.

The two races are key in determining whether Democrats hold their two-third legislative majority, which allows them to raise taxes without a single Republican vote, and are expected to attract hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign spending.

Polls locally and nationwide show Republicans get the bulk of the blame for the shutdown. One week into the shutdown, an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found that the public blames the Republican Party more for the shutdown than President Barack Obama by a 22-point margin, 53 percent to 31 percent.

A survey by the Register's OC Political Pulse poll found that of 112 Republican respondents, 46 percent said the GOP would be hurt more by the shutdown and 26 percent said Democrats would be hurt more. Of the 83 Democratic respondents, 96 percent said Republicans would be hurt more.

County GOP Chairman Scott Baugh brushed such polling aside, saying there are far bigger issues than the shutdown facing the country and that could hurt Democrats.

"The shutdown will have zero negative impact on elections in Orange County," he said. "There are several more fights that will be had, there are several more issues that will place this in the shadows."

We still have massive debt. We still have a health-care system that is dysfunctional. During these debates next year, I don't think Democrats will fare so well."

Sonenshein said Baugh's scenario is possible, but far from certain.

"This is certainly hurting Republicans in the short term but there's no election happening," he said.

"Most people say, 'Get the bad news out of the way before the election. This is just outside that window. But it all depends on what people do next.'"

Contact the writer: 714-796-6753 or mwisckol@ocregister.com