



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 21, 2010

Lessons from Massachusetts

Yesterday the New York Times concluded that Scott Brown's victory over Martha Coakley for Ted Kennedy's Senate seat resulted from Democrat complacency, Republican tentativeness, and Tea Party activism. Based upon interviews with more than 30 individuals involved in the race, the Times traced the rise of Brown from relative obscurity over the past month to victor on Monday.



Brendan Steinhauser, director of state campaigns for [FreedomWorks](#), founded in 1984 and currently chaired by former U.S. House Majority Leader Dick Armey, became aware of the potential for a victory in Massachusetts in early December: "To be honest, we kind of looked at it and said, this is a long shot," but he was impressed with the determination and zeal of the organizers. After supporters confirmed the possibility of an upset, Tea Party activists moved into Massachusetts and set up shop. At the time, Brown was 30 points behind Coakley in the polls.

This is the first lesson from Massachusetts: Polls can be wrong.

Coakley had won the primary in August handily, beating her nearest rival by almost 19 points. But by the middle of December, her lead over Brown had all but evaporated. According to a poll conducted by the National Republican Senatorial Committee, Brown was just three points behind Coakley among voters who said they were most likely to vote in the election

David Axelrod, a powerful [political advisor](#) to President Obama, wasn't aware of what was happening. Coakley was coasting, considering herself a shoo-in for the Senate seat. She had name recognition at Attorney General of Massachusetts, no Republican had held a Senate seat since 1972, and Democrats outnumbered Republicans three to one. She had even taken a vacation in early December prior to starting up her campaign for the seat. Axelrod said, "It was a classic case of everybody getting caught napping. This guy [Brown] knew exactly what he was doing. He's an appealing candidate. Pleasant guy. He's smart. He tapped into [the] anti-politician sentiment."

Thus, the second lesson from Massachusetts: Complacency is death.

By the time Democrat supporters of Coakley arrived in Massachusetts (many from the Obama administration) about two weeks before the election, the race was essentially over. Brown had successfully linked Coakley to the Washington Democrat elite, and had set the image for the race that



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Coakley was expecting to win because she deserved it.

The third lesson from Massachusetts: Hubris can be costly.

When it was clear that her campaign was in trouble, she called the President for help. His arrival on Sunday was too little, too late, and smacked of desperation. According to the *Times*, "The president, described by associates as increasingly distressed about the [Coakley] campaign, headed to Boston ... for a rally in which he could barely hide his discomfort. Mr. Obama all but pleaded for Democratic voters [to support Coakely]."

The fourth lesson: Never let them see you sweat.

The Tea Partiers successfully tapped into the frustration of voters over a number of issues: healthcare, the federal deficit, the "cramming down" of legislation, the sense of being ignored, and the disgust with both political parties. At the peak of the campaign, Brown was raising \$1 million a day on the Internet.

Lesson number five: There's a lot of unhappiness among those who vote.

Eric Odom, the executive director of the [American Liberty Alliance](#), noted: "For us, this is not so much about Scott Brown as it is about the idea that if we really collaborate as a mass movement, we can take any seat in the country." Odom was the organizer behind the Tax Day Tea Party rallies last April, and is planning similar rallies this year.

Lesson six: It's not about the size of the dog in the fight.

The Democrats supporting Coakley made a number of mistakes. Complacency as pointed out above gave Brown the initial advantage. Coakley's perceived arrogance in considering herself as entitled to the seat was another. Celinda Lake, a pollster for and supporter of the Coakley campaign, said: "If we had defined Scott Brown earlier, if we had been able to go up on the air earlier, if the Democrats had passed Wall Street financial reform.... There are lots of things that we could have done."

Lesson seven: Those mistakes won't happen again.

Brown was far from the [perfect](#) ideological candidate as pointed out in an article on this website earlier. Erick Erickson, the editor of RedState.com, said, "He's the kind of Republican who will give conservatives hearburn, but [he's] better than the other side." Although Brown is pro-abortion, and had a very liberal voting record in the State Senate, Erickson, a pro-life advocate, posted "almost daily appeals directing readers to Mr. Brown's Web site to contribute."

Lesson eight: It's not a perfect world.

Republicans in Washington and elsewhere [were saying](#) that Brown's victory is a "harbinger of a broader party surge, calling it a repudiation of President Obama's agenda that gives them renewed confidence for the 2010 midterm elections," and that it has "provided an extraordinary boost to the national Republican party."

However, comments from Tea Partiers at Odom's [website](#) indicate that they aren't looking to the Republican Party for salvation. One said: "Clearly, America is looking to the Tea Party for leadership." Another said: "Hopefully, today's election will show Obama and friends that the American People are not going to sit on their hands. Today is the first day of taking our great Country back. Hooray for the American Patriots, Hooray for the Tea Party! Beware of those politicians who do not put America first." Still another blogged: "The Tea Party Movement is an example of citizen participation against [the] governing elite centered far from [the] people."



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Lesson nine: It may be a little early for Republicans to take credit for Massachusetts.

Senator Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), who chairs the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, issued a statement concerning the Massachusetts race:

I have no interest in sugar coating what happened in Massachusetts. There is a lot of anxiety in the country right now. Americans are understandably impatient. The truth is Democrats understand the economic anger voters feel, that's in large part why we did well in 2006 and 2008.

But it is important to keep in mind that today's special election in Massachusetts was just that: a special election, with a whole host of circumstances that are unique. I would caution against taking a single unique election and extrapolating what it means for the midterms ten months away.

Lesson ten: Don't underestimate the importance of what happened in Massachusetts.

Newt Gingrich on his [website](#) outlined other lessons that may be gleaned from Brown's victory. As a "respectable Republican", Gingrich was spot on with at least one of the lessons learned:

The Tea Party movement is going to be a major force in 2010 and 2012.

It represents a real uprising of angry and frightened Americans who are fed up with both parties.

It's no accident Scott Brown spent so much of his victory speech emphasizing his independence. *This was not a Republican victory.* [Emphasis added.] Only 12% of Massachusetts is registered Republican. This was a people's victory — a genuine alliance of Republicans, independents, and moderate Democrats.

Both the Republicans and the Democrats should take notice of the scale and authenticity of the Tea Party movement. They will be back on April 15 and on dates after that. They will represent a healthy reform energy that will challenge both parties to rise to new levels of integrity and serious reform.

Last lesson: One can hope.

Photo of Scott Brown: AP Images



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