

Might as well get it out of the way up front: I predicted this race going the other way, and shall own up to my poor call. That said, I will note how I was not alone in giving Independent Greg Orman a slight edge in an extremely close contest (see Blog Post 5). Incumbent Senator Pat Roberts (R) actually won by roughly 12%^[5], meaning "close" was not the most fitting label, in hindsight. Therefore, we cannot really say that this result is surprising. Realistically, it was - statistically speaking - a coin toss between the two candidates, according to pre-November 4th polling. Some polling even had a 98%^[3] chance of the election playing out the way it did.

Now onto why it turned out the way it did. I had also predicted that Kansans would feel they could make a difference, and thus vote for Orman to do so; rather, Kansans seem to have been won over by the GOP's insistence that the road to a Republican majority was paved through their state. Perhaps Roberts's attempts to paint Orman as a democrat-in-disguise^[2] were successful, leading to fears that he would be sent forth only to caucus with the majority of the 113th Congress and extend it through the 114th. So even voters who were dissatisfied with Roberts and liked Orman's message may have not voted that way, in the interest of a guaranteed spot in the Republican majority instead of only a chance of one. Moreover, the army of conservative icons that marched through Kansas, coupled with a list of endorsements for Roberts that puts the grand in GOP, clearly were more impactful than they had initially appeared to be. Orman could not compete on that level, and his lack of political experience is only magnified when held against the lifelong career of his opponent.

Could I have predicted the outcome six months ago? Actually, yes, and I would have been right. Everyone who looked at this race six months ago had marked it off as an easy victory for Sen. Pat Roberts. At that point, Democratic candidate Chad Taylor was still in the race, and Greg Orman was just that third party millionaire who was doing better than most would expect from an Independent, but not well enough. Two months ago, right around the time Taylor dropped out, I could not have predicted this race accurately. Granted, then-current polling data may have suggested a landslide for Orman. Still, it was clear that that was merely a reaction to the one-man walk in the park suddenly shifting into a two-man sprint. Headlines like "The Senate Race in Kansas Just Got Crazy"^[4] only stirred the pot, so Orman's spike only indicated an easy prediction superficially.

This does not properly reflect congressional politics as a whole, considering how not every race goes through the same set of circumstances as this one. That said, it goes to show that change can happen at any point, despite things appearing predictable and consistent (when Kansas last elected a Democratic senator, presidents could still serve more than two consecutive terms)^[1]. The Kansas senate race of 2014 also reflects a growing trend: the American people are not overly fond of the current state of affairs with the two-party system. Yes, once the Democrat dropped out this race was automatically going to include a prominent third party player by default, but that did not mean they had to do as well as they did. A dissatisfaction-with-both-parties message proved to have broad appeal, evidenced by pre-Election Day findings and an eventual 42% vote share^[5].

Sources:

1. Hanna, John. "Lawsuit Could Scramble Kansas Senate Race.. Again." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 29 Sept. 2014. Web. 07 Nov. 2014.
2. Kaplan, Rebecca. "Is Greg Orman a Liberal Democrat? Sen. Pat Roberts Thinks so." *CBSNews*. CBS Interactive, 15 Oct. 2014. Web. 07 Nov. 2014.
3. Sides, John, Kennedy Elliott, Matt Nelson, and Peter Pezon. "Election Lab." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 4 Nov. 2014. Web. 07 Nov. 2014.
4. Silver, Nate. "The Senate Race In Kansas Just Got Crazy." *FiveThirtyEight.com*. ESPN, 3 Sept. 2014. Web. 07 Nov. 2014.
5. "US Senate (Kansas) Results." *Bing.com*. Microsoft, n.d. Web. 07 Nov. 2014. Data from Associated Press