The Presidential Pulse and the 1994 Midterm Congressional Election

James E. Campbell
Louisiana State University

The president's party lost more seats in 1994 than in any midterm election since 1946. The revised theory of surge and decline, which had successfully explained midterm losses since 1868, expected Democrats to lose only about half as many seats as they actually did. This research attempts to determine why the theory failed to anticipate the large 1994 losses. The aggregate national-level analysis examines 13 midterm elections from 1946 to 1994. Four hypotheses are examined: (1) that 1992 presidential short-term forces had been mismeasured because of the large Perot vote; (2) that partisan dealignment had weakened surge and decline effects to the point that they no longer accounted for interelection change; (3) that an increased linkage of presidential and congressional voting restored surge and decline effects to their prior levels; and (4) that a Republican realignment had shifted long-term political forces, obscuring the surge and decline in short-term political forces. The analysis supports the Republican realignment hypothesis. Incorporating the realignment into the surge and decline model accounts for 93% of the variance (adjusted R^2) in midterm seat losses since 1946 and accounts for the large presidential party losses in 1994. These findings offer further support for the revised theory of surge and decline.

The Presidential Pulse and the 1994 Midterm Congressional Election

The 1994 midterm election for the U.S. House of Representatives brought to a close the longest continuous majority in the history of the House. Democrats had controlled the House for forty years. After winning seat majorities in an unprecedented twenty consecutive congressional elections, Democrats lost 52 seats and with them control of the House to the Republicans.

With the possible exception of then-Minority Whip Newt Gingrich, no one expected Democrats to lose so many seats in 1994. The 1994 midterm results were more devastating to the president's party than any midterm since 1946. Although the president's party had lost seats in all but one of the thirty-three midterm elections since 1862, recent midterm losses had been small. In the previous two midterm elections of 1986 and 1990, the president's party had lost fewer than ten seats. Only once in the six midterm elections since 1970 had

An earlier version of this article received the Pi Sigma Alpha Award for the best paper delivered at the 1996 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. I thank Herb Weisberg, Valerie Sulfaro, and Bill Jacoby for their comments and suggestions.

The Journal of Politics, Vol. 59, No. 3, August 1997, Pp. 830–57

presidential party losses exceeded 25 seats. The exceptional year was 1974, the extraordinary Watergate midterm that followed only weeks after President Nixon's resignation and resulted in Republicans losing 48 seats. This unusual election produced unusual losses, at least when compared to other recent midterms. The median presidential party seat loss since 1970 had only been about 14 seats (compared to a median loss of about 38 seats in the prior six midterms). In four of these six midterms, the president's party had lost fewer than 16 seats. Given recent history, there was no reason to expect huge Democratic losses in 1994.

Aside from the history of recent midterm seat losses, there were other reasons to suspect that Democrats would suffer only a modest setback in 1994. The enhanced power of congressional incumbency should have protected the status quo. From the increased ability to accumulate campaign warchests to the advantages of name recognition and the permanent campaign while in office, the various advantages of incumbency were supposed to insulate incumbents from the forces of national partisan tides. Partisan dealignment also should have kept net party losses to a minimum. With greater split-ticket voting and the supposedly diminished role of partisanship in the electorate's thinking, there would be more crosscurrents in whatever national political tides there were. A party's losses in some areas would be more likely made up for by gains elsewhere. With both incumbency and dealignment at work, now more than ever, to paraphrase Tip O'Neill, all politics was supposed to be local.

1994 AND THE LEADING INDICATORS OF MIDTERM LOSSES

The leading indicators of midterm losses also suggested about average losses for the president's party in 1994. The strongest of these indicators has been the prior presidential vote. Historically, the party of a president who won by a larger margin in the on-year election sustained greater losses in the next midterm election. In general, the president's party loses about two-and-a-half seats in a midterm for every additional percentage point of the two-party presidential vote that the winning candidate received in the prior presidential election (Campbell 1992, 1993). The essential logic of this effect is embodied in the original and revised theories of surge and decline. By some combination of affecting turnout and vote choice in the presidential election year, winning presidential candidates and the surge of short-term forces that help them into office also provide a boost to candidates lower on their party's ticket (Bean 1948, 1950; Born 1984; Campbell 1960; Campbell 1986, 1991, 1993). In the midterm elections, without the help from the top of the ticket and without strong, presidential-year short-term forces in their favor, many of these candidates fail to win reelection (Born, 1990; Campbell 1985, 1993). Analyses of congressional elections since the Civil War indicate that there has been a strong presidential pulse to congressional elections (Campbell 1991, 1992). In the 1992 presidential election, President Clinton won

53.5% of the two-party presidential vote, about 1.5 percentage points below the average presidential victory margin. This lower-than-average presidential margin accounts in part for the actual loss of seats by the Democrats that year (a below-average surge, Republicans gained ten seats) and anticipated a smaller-than-average midterm decline in 1994. Moreover, the strong showing of independent presidential candidate Ross Perot in 1992 should have further muted the Democratic 1992 surge and its 1994 decline (Campbell 1993, 116).

The second leading indicator of midterm losses is the president's standing with the public at the midterm. Midterm elections are partially referenda on the incumbent administration (Kernell 1977; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1984; Tufte 1975, 1978). Popular presidents reduce their party's midterm losses, and unpopular presidents add to those losses. Every additional percentage point of approval in the Gallup Poll at the midterm reduces presidential losses by about one seat (Campbell 1993, 120). President Clinton's approval rating at the 1994 midterm was 43%, more than nine points below the average presidential rating at the midterm. While this should have yielded above-average losses, the additional losses would have amounted to only about nine to ten more Republican seats, hardly the massive losses that actually occurred. Moreover, a third (though weaker) midterm loss indicator, the state of the economy, suggested smaller losses. The economy, as measured by the annual change in real disposable income per capita (RDIPC), was healthier than most midterm economies. Annual economic growth (RDIPC) in 1994 was about 2.5% compared to an average midterm growth rate of only 1.4% (from 1946 to 1994). All of this is to say that there was little in the leading indicators of midterm losses to conclude that Democrats would sustain severe losses.[1] In fact, several models adapted for forecasting purposes, including a model drawn from the revised theory of surge and decline, predicted losses in the low twenty seat range and some predicted even smaller losses (Abramowitz 1994; Campbell 1994a, 1994b; Lewis-Beck 1994).

The Unexpectedly Large 1994 Midterm Decline

This paper examines the surge and decline model to determine what the 1994 midterm results tell us about the model and what the model may tell us about

[1] A fourth indicator often examined is the exposure variable, the number of seats for a party below or in excess of the party's usual number of seats (Oppenheimer, Stimson, and Waterman 1986, Waterman, Oppenheimer, and Stimson 1991). The exposure variable was defined for elections in recent years as deviation of the number of Democratic Party seats from their usual 254. By this reckoning, Democrats were overexposed by 4 seats going into the 1994 election. This small number of overexposed seats would have led to a prediction of very small 1994 midterm losses. It should be noted, however, that a regression equation with the exposure variable alone accounts for zero variance in midterm seat loss in the 13 midterms from 1946 to 1994. Additionally, when it was included in the surge-and-decline equation (prior presidential vote and midterm presidential popularity), it was not statistically significant ($p < .30$, one-tailed). It also did not approach statistical significance when added to the surge-and-decline equation with either a 1980 realignment variable (see Table 5) or economic growth in the midterm year.

the 1994 election. We begin by assessing how well the model accounts for the 1994 results. Table 1 presents an aggregate analysis of midterm seat losses for the president's party based on the revised theory of surge and decline (Campbell 1993, 120). The equation is estimated over the 12 midterm elections from 1946 to 1990. The theory explains midterm losses as partly resulting from the midterm decline from the prior presidential election (reflected in a negative effect of the prior presidential vote) and a referendum on the president's performance up to the midterm (reflected in a positive effect of presidential approval ratings). The equation is initially estimated by OLS regression; however, because of significant first-order autocorrelation (as indicated by the low Durbin-Watson statistic), the equation was reestimated using first differences (taking the difference on all variables of a case from the immediately prior case).[2] As the table indicates, the two-variable model is very strong. Both independent variables have their expected effects with coefficients of more than four times their standard errors. The equation accounts for nearly 90% of the variance in midterm seat losses. However, as strong as the model is in explaining seat losses in the dozen midterms from 1946 to 1990, it does not account for the large Democratic loss in 1994. Based on the estimated parameters from prior elections, Democrats should have lost about 26 seats in 1994. They actually lost twice that. The model's error in 1994 was about three times its mean error. How can we account for this? What can we learn from the 1994 error?

The 1994 election presents a puzzle for the revised theory of surge and decline. Does it mean that congressional elections are no longer structured by the "pulse" of presidential elections, the surge and decline of presidential politics? Was the presidential pulse or the extent of short-term partisan forces mismeasured in the 1992 presidential election because of the unusually large third-party vote for Ross Perot? Or, did 1994 indicate that the weakening of surge and decline effects through the 1970s and 1980s was now reversed? With the Republican congressional breakthrough in the south to match its presidential strength in that region, are surge and decline effects now restored to their prior levels? Or, to consider yet another possibility, was 1994 a true exception to the rule? Did long-term political changes embodied in a partisan realignment overshadow the usual short-term political forces of surge and decline?

Four Hypotheses

Four possible solutions to the 1994 puzzle will be considered. The first is that the two-party vote, though generally a good measure of the surge of short-term forces in presidential elections and, therefore, a good measure of how much of a repercussion or decline from that surge will be felt in the midterm, did not measure short-term forces very accurately in the 1992 presidential election. The

[2]Other autoregressive solutions were also examined and produced results quite similar to the first differences estimates.

TABLE 1

THE REVISED THEORY OF SURGE AND DECLINE AND EXPECTED 1994 MIDTERM SEAT LOSSES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY, 1946–1990

	Dependent Variable: Seat Change for the President's Party in the Midterm Election	
Independent Variable	OLS	First Differences
Prior Presidential Vote for the In-Party	−2.51 (2.86)	−2.74 (6.11)
Midterm Presidential Approval Rating	1.17 (3.40)	1.15 (4.26)
Constant	50.22	−1.58
Number of cases	12	11
R^2	.69	.90
Adjusted R^2	.62	.88
Standard error of estimate	11.83	10.85
Durbin-Watson statistic	.79	1.72
Mean absolute error	8.02	8.64
Expected 1994 seat change	−33.64	−26.15
1994 error (in seats)	−18.36	−25.85

Note: The regression coefficients were estimated *without* the 1994 case. *t*-ratios are in parentheses. The ***Prior Presidential Vote*** is the percentage of the two-party popular presidential vote that the winning presidential candidate received in the presidential election two years prior to the midterm election. The ***Midterm Presidential Approval Rating*** is the percentage of respondents in the Gallup Poll approving of the president's job performance at the time of the midterm election. In 1994, the ***Prior Presidential Vote*** was 53.455 percent and the ***Midterm Presidential Approval Rating*** was 43 percent. The first differences were −.485 for the prior presidential vote and −16 for midterm approval. Calculating the expected seat change from the expected difference value requires subtracting the prior seat change of −7.5 seats from the expected difference. For comparability in the seat data across elections, seats won by a third party were evenly divided between the major parties.

culprit: Ross Perot. Perot's unusually strong showing as an independent presidential candidate, capturing about 19% of the popular vote, may make the decision about what third-party presidential votes reveal about the favorability of the political climate to Democrats and Republicans much more important than usual. The two-party presidential vote essentially assumes that third-party voters would have voted like major party voters if they were forced to chose between the Democrat and Republican; that is, that third-party votes would divide in the same proportions as actual major party votes divided. However, an alternative assumption is that by rejecting both parties to vote for a nonmajor party candidate, third-party voters indicate that they are unlike major party voters and might, in general, divide randomly if forced to choose a major party option. If so, in considering what third-party votes say about the partisan short-term forces,

it may be more appropriate to divide them equally between the major party candidates. Given the competitiveness of presidential elections and the generally small numbers of third-party votes cast, there is usually little difference between the conventional two-party vote and that calculated by halving third-party votes, but the substantial vote for Perot in 1992 may have made the difference relevant in this instance.

Alternatively, though there are many reasons for third parties to emerge and draw a significant portion of the vote (Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus 1996), there is some reason to suspect that the relatively successful third parties arise out of disaffection from the incumbent administration. Challengers are rarely able to generate the kind of antipathy that so often stimulates a large third-party vote, but incumbents can. If so, third-party votes may best be grouped with the challenger's vote to gauge presidential year short-term forces against the incumbent's party. If the 1992 Perot vote was cast out of dissatisfaction with President Bush, that vote should not be reinterpreted as partly favorable to President Bush and the Republicans. In short, the first hypothesis is that the error of 1994 resulted from incorrectly measuring presidential year short-term forces, an error that would not necessarily have been apparent before 1994 because of the infrequency of substantial third-party presidential candidates.

A second possible explanation for the big error of 1994 is that surge-and-decline no longer tightly structures interelection congressional seat change. Partisan dealignment may have weakened national partisan linkages between candidates to the point that they simply are no longer relevant (Wattenberg 1990, 1991). The growing candidate-centered focus of campaigns, the increase in the incumbency advantage, and the rise in split-ticket voting may have finally weakened partisan linkages to the point that there are no longer real and general partisan presidential surges relevant to the fates of congressional candidates and, therefore, no commensurate midterm decline effects.[3] Some time ago, Ferejohn and Calvert (1984, 138) observed that there had been a "rather sharp drop in coattail voting between the earlier period [1932–1948] and the recent one [1952–1980]." I also reported an apparent weakening of surge-and-decline effects (Campbell 1985, 1149–52; 1991, 58–69; 1993, 128). Although they were still potent through 1990, it appeared that surge-and-decline effects had lost roughly a third of their pre-1970s strength (1993, 192). While I observed that this apparent weakening of presidential effects may have resulted from a staggered realignment in which Republican presidents had wasted their coattails in many uncontested Democratic, mostly southern districts, the possibility remains that

[3] Split-ticket voting is not as much of a threat to the revised theory of surge and decline as one might initially suppose, since the revised theory rests in large part on turnout effects among partisans as well as the tilt in the vote choice of independents. Whether partisans of the advantaged party turn out in larger-than-otherwise-expected numbers and whether partisans of the disadvantaged party (the losing presidential party) turn out at lower-than-otherwise-expected rates is unaffected by rates of ticket-splitting (see Campbell 1993, 32–5 and 202–3).

the cause was dealignment and it may have caused further deterioration or even eradication of surge-and-decline effects.

The third and fourth potential explanations of the 1994 error relate to a Republican realignment. A shift in long-term political forces may have overshadowed the effects of the surge and decline in short-term forces. It has happened before. The one exception to the law of midterm losses occurred in 1934, when Roosevelt's Democratic Party gained seats during the first midterm of the New Deal realignment. As short-term pro-Democratic forces of 1932 receded in 1934, Democrats should have lost seats. However, this midterm decline was more than offset by the long-term partisan shift toward the Democrats and the Democrats gained nine seats in the 1934 midterm. There is now considerable evidence that a secular realignment favoring Republicans began in the late 1960s or early 1970s, first in presidential voting habits, later in party identification, and later still in subpresidential voting habits (Bullock 1988; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Ladd 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Petrocik 1987; Stanley 1988). The glacial movement of this realignment was a result of reliance on voter conversion, rather than mobilization, several detours interrupting its maturation (e.g., Watergate), and the lack of a Republican infrastructure in the previously solid Democratic South. The realignment may have finally deepened to congressional elections in the 1980s and 1990s (Abramowitz 1995; Frymer 1996). The large congressional gains that Republicans made in southern states in 1994 and the fact that in 1994 there were more uncontested Republican seats than Democratic seats, for the first time in this century, suggests that the 1994 midterm may indeed have been part of a Republican realignment (Campbell 1996). The third and fourth explanations of the 1994 error consider two ways in which the current realignment may have affected estimates of surge and decline.

The third possible explanation of 1994 is that a fresh realignment may have restored partisan linkages. A realignment makes the issue basis of partisanship current and raises the relevance of partisanship in evaluating all candidates. A recent partisan realignment should reinvigorate partisanship and partisan linkages. Presidential surges and declines should be more potent. During a period of dealignment, surge-and-decline effects may be muted. During a realignment, they may be magnified. Rather than surge-and-decline effects weakening, as the dealignment hypothesis suggests and as they may have prior to the realignment, surge-and-decline effects may have been restored to their prior strength in recent years because of new or renewed partisan linkages.[4]

[4]It is also possible that party linkages, the link between voting for president and voting for other offices, may have strengthened without a realignment. Jacobson (1996), without using the word *realignment,* suggests that the 1994 election was successfully nationalized by issues such as those embodied in the Republicans' "Contract with America." He observed that the seats that Republicans took from Democrats in 1994 for the most part were in districts that had voted more Republican in recent presidential contests. As Jacobson put it, "Republicans won the House in 1994 because an unusually large number of districts voted locally as they had been voting nationally"(8).

The fourth possibility is that a recent Republican realignment may have simply shifted seats away from Democrats to Republicans. If so, Republican presidents should lose *fewer* seats in midterm elections than otherwise expected and Democratic presidents should lose *more* than otherwise expected. If the 1994 election was the continuation of a Republican realignment, Democrats may have lost some number of seats to realignment over and above those that they would have lost because of the receding 1992 pro-Democratic short-term forces.

The test for each of these hypotheses is whether it can simultaneously help to explain midterm seat changes in general and also account for the dramatic losses that Democrats sustained in the 1994 midterm. Is 1994 an inexplicably large deviation from a properly operationalized and fully specified theory of interelection partisan seat change, or can it be successfully incorporated into a general model of electoral change?

The Data

The data used in this aggregate analysis of midterm partisan seat change encompass the 13 midterm congressional elections from 1946 to 1994. The dependent variable is the net change in the number of seats held by the president's party as a result of the midterm election. For comparability, seats held by a third-party or independent are counted as half for each major party.[5] The number of seats held by a party after an election were obtained from Ornstein et al. (1996, Tables 1–18). Midterm seat losses over this period varied greatly. In three elections, the president's party lost fewer than eight seats (1962, 1986, and 1990). At the other end of the spectrum, the president's party lost more than 45 seats in five of these midterms (1946, 1958, 1966, 1974, and 1994). The mean number of seats lost by the president's party over these 13 midterm elections was about 28 seats.

Although seven different independent variables are considered at points in this analysis, there are two principal independent variables in the revised theory of surge and decline. The first is the two-party percentage of the popular presidential vote received by the candidate winning the presidency in the prior presidential election. This indicates the magnitude of short-term forces that had favored the president's party. The popular vote for presidential candidates was obtained from Congressional Quarterly's *Guide to U.S. Elections* (1985, 2d ed.) and reports of the official returns in *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (1989, 1993). The two-party vote percentage for the winning presidential candidate was less than 52% of the vote in three elections (1960, 1968, and 1976) and exceeded 59% in

[5] Third-party congressional seats were halved since losing a seat to a third-party or independent candidate is, in general, not as harmful to a party as losing a seat to the major opposition party. In any case, during the period under study, there were never more than two seats held by representatives unaffiliated with a major party.

another three elections (1964, 1972, and 1984). The mean winning two-party presidential vote percentage over this period was about 55%.

Although the measurement of the presidential vote seems a straightforward matter, the mismeasurement hypothesis suggests a possible complication arising from the treatment of nonmajor party votes. Independent or third-party presidential candidates may introduce additional measurement error in the two-party vote as an indicator of presidential year short-term forces. The two-party vote implicitly assumes that third-party voters were swayed by short-term forces in the same way that major-party voters were moved—that if they had chosen between the major parties, they would have divided as major party voters divided. This need not be the case. Moreover, since third-party presidential candidates received substantial vote shares in 3 of the 13 presidential elections in this series (the 1968, 1980, and 1992 presidential elections), the treatment of third-party votes may be of some importance. Because of this, the analysis also considers the prior presidential vote in two alternative ways. First, rather than apportioning third-party votes in proportion to the major party vote, third-party votes are halved between the parties. This recognizes that third-party voters rejected the options of voting for either major party candidate. If they had to choose between the parties, in general it is safest to assume that it would be a coin toss. Finally, as stated earlier, there is some evidence to suggest that third parties arise out of dissatisfaction with the incumbent, rather than as an equal rejection of both the incumbent and the major party challenger. There is reason to suppose, for instance, that Ross Perot was running more against George Bush than against Bill Clinton. If this interpretation of third parties is valid, it suggests that third-party votes should be counted as anti-incumbent votes (the incumbent holding the White House at the time of the presidential election and not necessarily the presidential party at the midterm) rather than divided either proportionately or evenly between the major parties.

The second principal independent variable is the president's approval rating in the Gallup Poll at the time of the midterm election. This is the principal indicator of the public's referendum-like judgment on presidential job performance. The least popular president at a midterm in this series was Harry Truman, whose job performance was rated positively by fewer than a third of respondents at the time of the 1946 midterm. The approval ratings on three other occasions were in the low 40% range, including Truman in 1950 (43%), Reagan in 1982 (42%), and Clinton in 1994 (43%). At the other extreme, three presidents enjoyed positive ratings from more than 60% of the public: Eisenhower in 1954 (65%), Kennedy in 1962 (67%), and Reagan in 1986 (63%). The mean presidential approval rating at the midterm was about 52%.

In addition to the prior presidential vote and midterm presidential popularity, the analysis includes several other independent variables. Initial models of midterms as referenda on presidential job performance had included a measure of the state of the economy. Tufte (1975) examined the annual change in real disposable income per capita as the measure of economic conditions most relevant

to voters. My prior analysis had indicated that the economy had no direct effect on midterm seat losses (Campbell 1985, 1993; see also the debate between Erikson 1990 and Jacobson 1990). However, in seeking to explain the 1994 anomaly it may be worth reconsidering the possibility of direct economic effects. The data on real disposable income per capita were reported by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (1989, Table 2.1) and U.S. Bureau of the Census (1995, Table 706).

In considering the possibility that dealignment dampened surge-and-decline effects, the analysis also examines a set of dummy variables. These are coded as 0 for the early years in the series and 1 for years during partisan dealignment. Three possible starting points for partisan dealignment are considered: the 1968, 1972, or 1976 presidential election. Since the analysis is oriented in terms of the president's party, and since that party inevitably loses seats in the midterm, a dealignment variable should take a positive sign, indicating a reduction in presidential party losses. Alternatively, the dealignment variables are specified as interacting with the presidential surge variable. If partisan dealignment weakens party effects, it should do so in proportion to the prior presidential surge. That is, dealignment should dampen decline effects rather than simply reduce presidential seat losses across the board.

In contrast to dealignment, a partisan realignment or any other factor that would nationalize the campaign might strengthen the link between presidential and congressional voting. If the link between presidential and congressional votes tightens, we should expect stronger presidential election year surges and commensurately deeper declines in the midterm. In light of this, we examine the frequency of split-result districts in presidential election years and specify it as having an interactive effect on midterm seat losses, interacting with the prior presidential surge as measured by the presidential vote for the winning candidate. This interaction should gauge both the effects of weakening partisan linkages during dealignment and strengthening partisan linkages during realignment. The percentage of split-result districts, districts won by one party's House candidate and carried by the other major party's presidential candidate, were obtained from Ornstein et al. (1996, 70). The percentage of split-result districts over this period rose from a low of 11% in 1944 to highs of about 44% in 1972 and again in 1984. The percentage of split districts dropped to 34% in 1988 and further to 23% in 1992. There were fewer split-result districts in 1992 than in any election since 1952. The mean percentage of split-result districts since 1944 is 29%.

The final set of variables also concerns the possibility of a partisan realignment. If a Republican realignment simply shifts a number of seats in favor of the Republicans and away from Democrats during the series, then during the course of the realignment, Republican presidents should lose *fewer* seats than otherwise expected and Democratic presidents should lose *more* seats than otherwise expected. While recent research suggests that a secular realignment began sometime between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, the exact timing of the realignment's impact in congressional elections is uncertain. It is clear, however, that the effects of the realignment appeared first in presidential elections and were delayed in

congressional elections, most probably by a lack of a Republican infrastructure in southern states. It is even possible that the realignment did not deepen to the congressional level until the 1994 midterm itself. To allow for different timings of the realignment, a set of 13 realignment variables was constructed, each specifying the realignment as beginning in a different election of the series. Each version of the variable was constructed so that pre-realignment midterms were coded as zero. Realigning elections were coded as +1 when the president at the midterm was a Democrat and as −1 when the president was a Republican. The variable is expected to have a negative coefficient, indicating additional realignment-induced Democratic losses and realignment-offset Republican losses. Aside from measuring the impact of a realignment, the earliest start point version of this variable, an implausible but considered 1946 realignment start, addresses recent research that suggested a general Republican advantage in midterm elections. If this hypothesis is true, whether the president at midterm is a Republican or a Democrat should make a difference to midterm losses throughout the series.

The Findings

The Mismeasurement Hypothesis

Table 2 examines three regression analyses of midterm seat losses that use three different versions of the presidential vote as a measure of presidential election year short-term forces. The three differ in their treatment of votes for third-party candidates, dividing them in proportion to the major party vote (equivalent to the two-party vote), halving them between the major parties, and counting them in opposition to the previous incumbent presidential party. The first equation updates through 1994 the OLS equation in Table 1. The second simply substitutes the halved third-party vote presidential vote for the two-party vote, and the third equation substitutes the third-party as anti-incumbent presidential vote measure. Before comparing the three measures to each other, it is interesting to observe that adding the 1994 midterm case to the regression, despite the few cases involved in the analysis, had only a very minor impact on the estimated equations. The coefficients of the presidential vote and midterm presidential popularity variables and the overall fit of the model were changed only slightly with the inclusion of 1994 (a small drop in the adjusted R^2 from .62 to .60).[6]

A comparison of the two alternative measures of short-term forces to the two-party or proportional division measure indicates that neither is superior to the two-party presidential vote. There is little to choose between the two-party vote and the third-party-vote-halved measures, either in generally explaining midterm seat loss variance or in accounting for the 1994 midterm results. The third party

[6] A robust regression analysis based on the resistant diagnostic statistic generated from a least median squares analysis (Rousseeuw and Leroy 1987) also indicated that the 1994 midterm was not an outlier or influence point.

TABLE 2

THE REVISED THEORY OF SURGE AND DECLINE AND ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS OF THIRD-PARTY PRESIDENTIAL VOTES IN THE MEASUREMENT OF SHORT-TERM PARTISAN FORCES, 1946–1994

Dependent Variable: Seat Change for the President's Party in the Midterm Election			
	Treatment of Third-Party Presidential Votes in Prior Presidential Election		
Independent Variable	Divided Proportionately	Halved	Counted as Anti-Incumbent
Prior Presidential Vote for the In-Party*	−2.36	−2.35	−1.86
	(2.59)	(2.55)	(1.99)
Midterm Presidential Approval Rating	1.30	1.32	1.19
	(3.74)	(3.77)	(3.13)
Constant	33.88	31.68	13.70
Number of cases	13	13	13
R^2	.67	.66	.60
Adjusted R^2	.60	.60	.52
Standard error of estimate	12.40	12.47	13.56
Durbin-Watson statistic	1.09	1.11	1.47
Expected 1994 seat change	−36.69	−35.63	−51.24
1994 error (in seats)	−15.31	−16.37	−.76

**Note:* Each of the three equations employs a different measurement of the presidential vote as a result of treating third-party presidential votes differently (as indicated in the heading above the reported coefficients). *t*-ratios are in parentheses. Dividing third-party presidential votes in proportion to the major party vote is equivalent to the division of the two-party vote. Halving the third-party vote counts half of votes cast for third-parties for each of the major parties. Counting third-party votes as anti-incumbent votes counts only those votes cast for the in-party in the prior presidential election and all other votes as votes cast against the incumbent party in that presidential election. In 1994 the proportionately divided prior presidential vote was 53.455%, the third-party halved prior presidential vote was 52.78%, and the third-party as anti-incumbent prior presidential vote was 62.553%. The major difference in 1994 results from the large popular vote received by Ross Perot.

as-anti-incumbent measure does a very good job of explaining 1994. The error was only about one seat. It suggests that the two-party presidential vote in 1992 understated how strongly short-term forces were running against George Bush. However, this vote measure does considerably less well than either of the other measures in helping to generally explain midterm losses. In using this alternative measure of the vote and despite its much better fit with the 1994 case, the proportion of explained variance drops from 60 to 52%. The mismeasurement hypothesis does not meet the dual test of improving the model generally and explaining 1994.

The Dealignment Hypothesis

Table 3 examines whether midterm declines from the prior presidential surges have been muted in recent midterms because of partisan dealignment. The non-dealignment specification of equation 1 can be contrasted with six dealignment specifications. The six specifications involve three different start points for the dealignment (before the 1970, 1974, and 1978 midterms) and specify the effects as either additive or interactive, reducing the negative effect of the prior presidential vote. In each case, the dealignment variables have the expected effect. The additive terms indicate that presidential parties have lost about 9 to 12 fewer seats in recent midterm elections. The interactive terms suggest a slight weakening of midterm decline effects. Of the three alternative start points for the dealignment, the evidence of dealignment effects is strongest for the 1978 midterm.

In general, the evidence of dealignment effects is less than compelling.[7] Although the effects are in the expected direction, the coefficients are relatively small and barely reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < .05$ one-tailed) in the 1978 equations. The interactive equation with a 1978 dealignment start was the strongest of the six dealignment equations, improving explained variance from 60 to 69%; however, it suggests that midterm decline effects only dropped from 2.25 seats for every point of the prior presidential vote to about 2 seats in recent years. Moreover, none of the dealignment specifications helped to account for the 1994 Democratic Party debacle. In fact, each dealignment specification expected a smaller loss in the 1994 midterm than the non-dealignment equation.

The Linkage Hypothesis

Table 4 presents regression estimates of the baseline presidential vote and popularity equation and that equation with an interaction of the presidential vote and the split-result district variable. Recall that the hypothesis is that surge-and-decline effects are stronger when there is greater carryover from presidential to congressional results. When there is a great deal of split-ticket voting and many split-result districts, surge-and-decline effects should be muted. As expected, a higher percentage of split-result districts reduced the impact of the midterm decline, though the coefficient fell just short of conventional levels of statistical significance. The interaction term suggests that midterm decline effects in 1974, following the highest split-result rate in 1972 of 44% of House districts, were estimated at about 3.3 seats lost for every additional percentage point of the prior

[7] On the other hand, the lack of dealignment findings comports well with the findings of Keith et al. (1992) and Miller (1991). Both analyses suggest that the claim of a substantial partisan dealignment in recent decades is not supported by the evidence, at least with respect to party identification and the potency of partisanship in determining the vote choice.

TABLE 3

THE REVISED THEORY OF SURGE AND DECLINE AND PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT EFFECTS ON MIDTERM SEAT LOSSES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY, 1946–1994

Dependent Variable: Seat Change for the President's Party in the Midterm Election							
		First of Recent Midterm Elections					
		1970		1974		1978	
Independent Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Prior Presidential	−2.36	−2.35	−2.44	−2.57	−2.65	−2.22	−2.25
Vote for the In-Party	(2.59)	(2.65)	(2.76)	(2.86)	(2.91)	(2.67)	(2.77)
Midterm Presidential	1.30	1.28	1.27	1.30	1.30	1.32	1.32
Approval Rating	(3.74)	(3.80)	(3.79)	(3.88)	(3.87)	(4.22)	(4.27)
Recent Elections	—	8.73	—	8.80	—	11.58	—
Dummy Variable		(1.31)		(1.30)		(1.80)	
Prior Presidential	—	—	.16	—	.16	—	.22
Vote Interaction with Recent Elections			(1.33)		(1.32)		(1.91)
Constant	33.88	29.45	34.62	41.01	45.33	20.02	22.18
Number of cases	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
R^2	.67	.72	.72	.72	.72	.76	.76
Adjusted R^2	.60	.63	.63	.63	.63	.67	.69
Standard error of estimate	12.40	11.98	11.95	12.00	11.97	11.21	11.02
Durbin-Watson statistic	1.09	1.37	1.38	1.39	1.41	1.37	1.37
Expected 1994 seat change	−36.69	−32.47	−32.48	−31.66	−31.75	−30.03	−29.87
1994 error (in seats)	−15.31	−19.53	−19.52	−20.34	−20.26	−21.97	−22.13

Note: *t*-ratios are in parentheses. Three different cutpoints are used for the recency of the midterm election: 1970, 1974, and 1978. The groupings include the cutpoint election. Recent midterms are coded 1 and earlier midterm elections are coded 0.

TABLE 4

THE REVISED THEORY OF SURGE AND DECLINE AND THE NATIONALIZATION OF SHORT-TERM FORCES IN THE PRIOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ON MIDTERM SEAT LOSSES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY, 1946–1994

Dependent Variable: Seat Change for the President's Party in the Midterm Election		
	Interaction of Prior Presidential Vote with Percentage of Split-Result Districts	
Independent Variable	Not Included	Included
Prior Presidential Vote for the In-Party	−2.36	−3.95
	(2.59)	(3.20)
Interaction of Prior Presidential Vote with Percent of Split-Result Congressional Districts	—	.015
		(1.74)
Midterm Presidential Approval Rating	1.30	.98
	(3.74)	(2.67)
Constant	33.88	113.36
Number of cases	13	13
R^2	.67	.75
Adjusted R^2	.60	.67
Standard error of estimate	12.40	11.31
Durbin-Watson statistic	1.09	1.40
Mean absolute error	8.84	8.10
Expected 1994 seat change	−36.69	−37.15
1994 error (in seats)	−15.31	−14.85

Note: *t*-ratios are in parentheses. Split-result congressional districts are those in which one party wins the House election and the district is carried by the other party's presidential candidate. Twenty-three percent of congressional districts in 1992 were split-result districts. This was the lowest percentage of split-result districts since the 1952 presidential election.

presidential vote. In 1946, following the lowest split-result rate of 11% of House districts, midterm decline effects were estimated at about 3.8 seats for every point of the prior presidential vote.

The evidence of the linkage hypothesis is weak. An alternative test, using the estimated proportion of split-ticket voting in the interaction term instead of split-result districts, produced even weaker results.[8] Although the split-result and pres-

[8]Using the proportion of ticket-splitters in the electorate in the interaction term, instead of the proportion of split-result districts, produced an estimated equation that accounted for less than 60% (adjusted R^2 .59) of the variance in midterm seat losses. This was 1% less than the baseline model. The interaction term did not even approach conventional levels of statistical significance. The amount

idential vote interaction coefficient is in the expected direction, the estimated effect is not very strong and does not help to explain the 1994 election results at all. Whether the linkage interaction term is included or not, the president's party was expected to lose about 37 seats in 1994, about 15 seats short of the actual loss and about twice the average error of either specification.

The Realignment Hypothesis

The first problem to confront in examining whether a Republican realignment was overlaid on and obscured the dynamics of surge and decline is to determine when the realignment occurred, if in fact a recent Republican realignment in congressional elections has taken place. The question of when a realignment began was addressed by examining a series of alternative start points for the realignment. The start point for the Republican realignment was allowed to vary from prior to the first election in the series, 1946, up to the 1994 midterm itself. The variables were coded as 0 before the realignment, +1 for Democratic administrations during the realignment, and −1 for Republican administrations during the realignment. Each version of the realignment variable was examined by adding it to the baseline presidential vote and midterm presidential popularity equation of midterm losses. The proportion of variance explained by the various realignment equations, varying only by when the realignment began, is plotted in Figure 1. As the figure clearly shows, the strongest realignment specification indicates a Republican realignment beginning in the early 1980s. Introducing the realignment variables into two differently specified equations also produced a peak realignment effect in the early 1980s.[9] Not only did this timing produce the tightest model fit, but the fit of alternative realignment timings improved as they approached 1980 and declined as they moved away from the 1980–82 elections.[10]

---

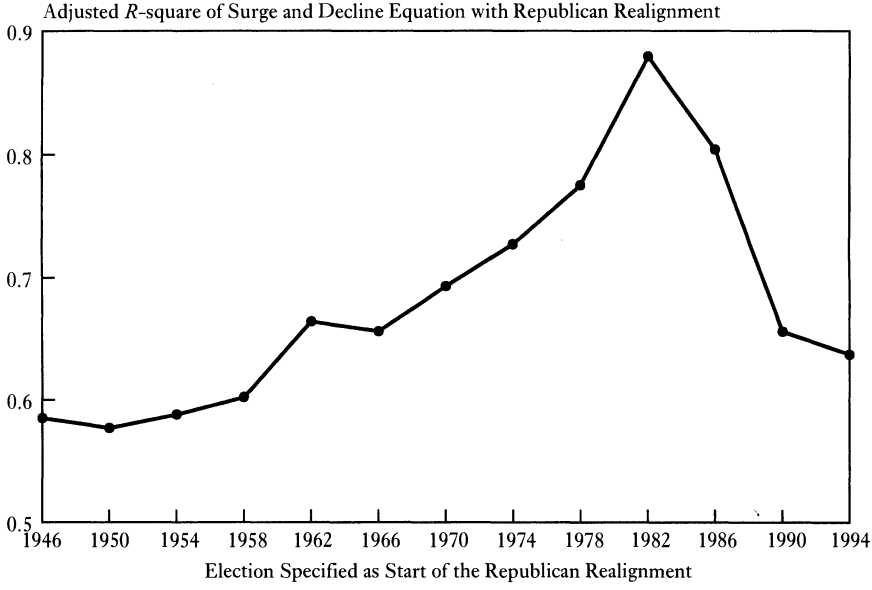
of split-ticket voting was calculated from NES surveys (Miller and Traugott 1989, 336; Fiorina 1990, 122) and calculated directly from NES for 1992. Based on split-ticket voting rates in the 1950s, split-ticket voting was estimated at 14.5% for the 1944 and 1948 elections since NES studies were not conducted in those elections. Split-ticket voting ranged from a low of 12% in 1952 to a high of 30% in 1972.

[9] The two alternative specifications included both the prior presidential vote and midterm presidential popularity. One also included the economic growth variable and a second included the split-result and prior presidential vote interaction term (Table 4). In each of the three specifications, the realignment variable peaked at 1980–82.

[10] An analysis using midterm congressional vote loss rather than seat loss for the president's party produces a slightly different timing for the realignment. The vote loss analysis suggests that the realignment deepened to congressional elections prior to the 1986 midterm rather than the 1982 midterm as indicated by the seat loss analysis. With the prior presidential vote, midterm presidential popularity, and the midterm rate of economic growth in the equation with alternative timings of the realignment, the midterm vote loss regression accounts for 79% of variance with a 1982 start, 87% with a 1986 start, 82% with a 1990 start, and only 54% with a 1994 start (adjusted R^2s). The discrepancy, though slight, may indicate that the seat loss analysis was picking up some of the

FIGURE 1

EXPLAINING MIDTERM SEAT LOSSES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY AND THE TIMING OF THE REPUBLICAN REALIGNMENT, 1946–1994



Note: The adjusted R-square is from an equation with the number of seats lost in the midterm election by the presidents party as the dependent variable and three independent variables: the percentage of the two-party presidential vote for the winning candidate in the prior presidential election, the president's midterm approval rating, and a realignment variable. The realignment variable is coded zero up until the specified year on the horizontal axis, thereafter it coded +1 if the presidents at the midterm is a Democrat and −1 if a Republication. If a realignment occurred, Democratic should lose fewer than otherwise expected. The realignment variable was statistically significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed) for realignment variables starting in 1970 through 1986 and was not statistically significant for the first six and last two (1990 and 1994) starting points.

pro-Republican reapportionment effects of the early 1980s. The reapportionment of seats to more conservative southern states may have helped Republicans; and, though Democrats often controlled redistricting within states, eliminating the malapportionment that had evolved through population movement since the previous redistricting may have generally helped Republicans (Campbell 1996). The realignment coefficient in vote loss equation using the 1984–86 realignment variable was −2.45 ($p < .01$). The prior presidential vote and midterm presidential popularity variables were also significant ($p < .01$), but midterm economic growth was only barely significant at the .10 level (one-tailed).

Additionally, the improved fit of including the early 1980s realignment variable was considerable. The proportion of explained midterm seat loss variance increased from less than 60% to nearly 90%.[11]

It is important to note that this analysis does not indicate that the Republican realignment deepened into congressional elections only in 1994. It is not an idiosyncratic explanation of the 1994 midterm. In fact, the version of the realignment variable that suggests that the realignment began with the 1994 midterm was not statistically significant ($p > .08$, one-tailed). The results of the 1994 midterm were perceived as a plausible congressional realigning year because of the enormous Democratic seat losses. Seat losses in the three earlier congressional realigning midterm elections (1982, 1986, and 1990) were not regarded as realignment shifts because presidential losses, each for a Republican president, were less than expected and the smaller-than-expected losses were incorrectly interpreted as the result of dealignment. From the perspective of the 1994 election, these small midterm losses were not so much dealignment-muted losses for the president's party as they were realignment-offset losses for the Republican party.

Table 5 presents a set of five regression estimates incorporating the possibility of a Republican realignment beginning after the 1978 and before the 1982 midterm elections. The equations also consider possible economic effects on midterm losses. Tufte (1975 and 1978) had originally specified the economic growth rate as an important element in the midterm referenda on the president's performance. However, as equation 2 shows, when midterm decline effects are considered in the same model as the midterm economy, economic effects do not approach statistical significance. Nevertheless, since they were a component in the original referenda model, since their coefficients are consistently in the expected direction, and since the realignment may have obscured economic influences, they may deserve reconsideration.

As equation 3 demonstrates, the evidence of a strong, secular Republican realignment in congressional elections appears compelling. The inclusion of the 1980 realignment variable, as Figure 1 had shown, increases the proportion of explained midterm seat loss variance from 60 to 88% (adjusted R^2). The mean absolute error dropped from about nine seats to fewer than four and a half. The effects of the realignment variable are nearly five times its standard error and the effects of the prior presidential vote and midterm presidential popularity are more than five times their standard errors. Both the prior presidential vote and midterm presidential popularity in this equation have estimated effects on the order of previous estimates (Campbell 1993, 120). Since 1980, the Republican realignment has reduced seat losses of Republican administrations by about 18 seats (in

[11] The statistical insignificance of the initial 1946 realignment variable under three alternative specifications indicates that the suspected general Republican advantage in midterm elections is not supported by the evidence.

TABLE 5

THE REVISED THEORY OF SURGE AND DECLINE AND REPUBLICAN REALIGNMENT EFFECTS ON MIDTERM SEAT LOSSES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY, 1946–1994

Dependent Variable: Seat Change for the President's Party in the Midterm Election					
Independent Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Prior Presidential Vote Percentage for the In-Party	−2.36 (2.59)	−2.17 (2.20)	−2.82 (5.52)	−2.53 (6.06)	−2.53 (5.77)
Midterm Presidential Approval Rating	1.30 (3.74)	1.24 (3.40)	1.07 (5.48)	.97 (6.11)	.99 (5.80)
Midterm Economic Growth Rate (RDIPC)	—	.98 (.67)	—	1.58 (2.56)	1.55 (2.38)
1980 Republican Realignment	—	—	−18.23 (4.91)	−19.35 (6.55)	−20.43 (5.35)
Constant	33.88	24.52	67.99	54.96	53.91
Number of cases	13	13	13	13	12
R^2	.67	.68	.91	.95	.95
Adjusted R^2	.60	.58	.88	.93	.91
Standard error of estimate	12.40	12.76	6.81	5.36	5.64
Durbin-Watson statistic	1.09	1.04	2.20	2.47	2.37
Mean absolute error	8.84	8.08	4.44	3.02	3.23
Expected seat change in the 1994 midterm	−36.69	−35.46	−54.88	−54.01	−55.74
1994 error (in seats)	−15.31	−16.54	2.88	2.01	3.74

Note: *t*-ratios are in parentheses. The dependent variable is the actual net number of seats lost by the president's party in the midterm election. The ***Prior Presidential Vote*** is the percentage of the popular two-party vote cast in the prior presidential election for the winnning presidential candidate. ***Midterm Presidential Approval*** is the percentage of respondents in the Gallup Poll approving of the president's job performance at the time of the midterm election. ***Midterm Economic Change*** is the annual change in the real disposable income per capita (RDIPC), as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. 1980 ***Republican Realignment*** takes a value of −1 for Republican presidents in 1980 and thereafter and a value of +1 for Democratic presidents after 1980. Elections prior to 1980 have a score of zero on this variable. Equation 5 excludes the 1994 midterm.

1982, 1986, and 1990) and added a like number to the midterm seat losses of Democrats (the sole case being 1994). Moreover, incorporating the realignment variable into the revised surge and decline model also helps to explain the large Democratic losses in 1994. Based on Clinton's vote in 1992, his standing with the public in 1994, and the movement of seats to the Republicans in the realignment, Democrats were expected to lose almost 55 seats, about three more than they actually lost.

Equation 4 reexamines the impact of economic growth on midterm seat losses now that realignment effects have been taken into account. The effects of the economy are in the expected direction. Midterm seat losses for the president's party are reduced by about 1.5 seats for every percentage point of growth in real disposable income per capita in the midterm election year. The economic effect is now statistically significant ($p < .02$, one-tailed). The coefficients of the other three variables in the equation are all at least six times their standard errors ($p < .001$). Based on the standardized coefficients, the prior presidential vote, midterm presidential popularity, and the effects of the Republican realignment were of roughly equal importance; and economic conditions, though statistically significant, had a relatively smaller impact.[12] The overall model accounts for 93% of the variance in midterm seat losses and further reduces the mean absolute error to a mere three seats. The expected 1994 midterm seat loss for Democrats based on equation 4 is 54 seats, an error of only two seats.[13] Based on the estimated parameters and setting aside the effects of the Republican realignment, Democrats would have been expected to lose about 34 seats in 1994. Democrats lost an additional 20 seats because of the Republican realignment.

Although spanning a good deal of history, the equation estimates in this analysis are still based on a relatively small number of observations. However, there is evidence that these findings are not especially sensitive to the influence of the unusual 1994 election, the orientation of the variables, or peculiarities in the seat loss dependent variable. Equation 5 is specified identically to equation 4 but is estimated without the 1994 midterm. It produces estimates very similar to those with the 1994 midterm included. Additionally, a companion analysis (see Appendix A) orienting the seat change data in terms of the Democratic Party, rather than the president's party, provides very similar results and an analysis of midterm *vote loss* for the president's party also supports these findings (see Appendix B).

The Republican Realignment

The Republican realignment variable, quite clearly significant in both equations 3 and 4 of Table 5, indicates that in midterm elections since 1980, Republican

[12] The standardized regression coefficients were −.51 for the prior presidential vote, .51 for midterm presidential approval, −.55 for the Republican realignment, and .22 for economic growth. This, however, may understate the impact of the prior presidential vote since the analysis is oriented in terms of the president's party at the midterm and the presidential vote determines which party is the presidential party.

[13] The evidence in behalf of the realignment thesis is also consistent with recent errors in estimating the on-year effects of the presidential surge. In 1992, despite President Clinton's presidential victory, Democrats lost ten House seats. Although there is plenty of precedent for winning presidential candidates not to register House seat gains for their party (Taft in 1908, −7; Wilson in 1916, −22; Kennedy in 1960, −21; and Bush in 1988, −2), based on estimates of presidential surge effects, Democrats were expected to gain, not lose, eight or nine seats (Campbell 1993, 220). A general Republican shift would help to account for this 18- or 19-seat error.

presidents (Reagan and Bush) lost 18 or 19 fewer seats than otherwise expected and that the Democratic president in this period (Clinton) lost 18 or 19 more seats than otherwise expected. Considerable caution, however, should be exercised in interpreting what this means. It does not necessarily mean that Republicans have gained and Democrats have lost 18 or 19 seats in each of the past four elections in this period. This would have meant a 73 to 77 seat swing from Democrats to Republicans (18 to 19 Republican seats in each of 4 elections)—something that clearly did not happen.[14] Depending on the number of pre-realignment elections examined, the Republicans occupied an average of about 160 to 168 seats prior to 1980 (a mean of 168 for the six elections from 1968 to 1978). If their 1994 seat share is discounted by the number of seats they won because of the midterm decline from Clinton's 1992 victory and the midterm referenda on his performance (both short-term gains for Republicans), Republicans would have a base of 196 seats in 1994 (perhaps 200 with party switchers). By this reckoning, Republicans may have gained between 30 and 40 seats from the realignment to this point, rather than 73 to 77 realignment seats.

If the Republican Party did not add the full 18 or 19 seats to its base in each realigning election as a result of Republican presidents' losing 18 or 19 fewer seats than expected in midterms, where did these seats go? The answer is that they went nowhere. The fact that these seats were not lost does not mean that they had been gained in the first place. A number of seats not lost in these midterms were seats that should have been won in the prior presidential election, but were not. In the on-year elections, based on their size of their presidential votes, Republican Presidents Reagan in 1984 and Bush in 1988 should have brought more Republican House members into office on their coattails than they did and, presumably, many would have remained as part of the realignment. A separate analysis of the presidential surge in on-year elections indicates that Republican seat gains in these two elections were about 17 to 19 seats short of expected, about the difference between the expected and realized realignment numbers in these two elections (Campbell n.d., Table 6.6). The general interpretation was that coattails were shorter due to partisan dealignment and the growth in the incumbency advantage. In retrospect, however, the evidence is also consistent with an interpretation of wasted presidential coattails or a delayed realignment. Whether the national political forces of the 1984 and 1988 elections were short-term or long-term, they favored Republicans. Unfortunately for Republicans, forces were most strongly in their favor in areas of the formerly solid Democratic south that lacked credible Republican congressional candidates and often lacked any Republican candidate at all. As a result, coattails were wasted and the effects of the realignment were delayed, until 1994.

[14] As a point of comparison, my expanded analyses of surge and decline estimated the New Deal realignment in the 1932–34 election cycle to shift from 56 to 68 seats from the Republicans to the Democrats (Campbell 1991, 482; 1993, 116 and 126).

Discussion

The results of the preceding analysis have clarified the effects of both short-term and long-term forces on electoral change in several ways. In particular, the analysis clarified the status of the theory of surge and decline. *The dynamics of surge and decline continue to structure electoral change in midterm congressional elections.* The president's party still loses seats in midterm elections in proportion to the prior presidential surge of short-term forces. Congressional candidates of the winning presidential party in on-year elections are helped by presidential coattails and by the strong short-term political forces that favor their party more generally. But these advantages are short-lived. These candidates must run on their own, in a less hospitable atmosphere of the midterm and those who would not have survived without the boost of their presidential election advantages go down to defeat in the midterm. As unusual as the 1994 election appeared, its inclusion in the analysis did not alter the estimated repercussion effect of the prior presidential election. All things being equal, the president's party should expect to lose 2.5 seats for every additional percentage point of the two-party presidential vote that it received in the prior presidential election. In 1994, as in past midterm elections, there was a midterm decline from the prior presidential surge. There continued to be a presidential pulse to congressional elections.

The analysis also made three more specific points about the effects of short-term forces. (1) As found previously, seat losses in the midterm election partly reflect a midterm verdict on the president's performance. Popular presidents cut their party's losses and unpopular presidents add to their party's woes. Every additional percentage point added to the president's midterm approval rating saves the president's party one seat that it would otherwise have lost. (2) Although there was reason to suspect that the two-party presidential vote might be improved as a measure of short-term forces in the presidential election by treating nonmajor party presidential votes differently, the analysis indicated that neither of the alternative measures outperformed the two-party presidential vote. (3) The analysis clarified the effects of economic conditions on the midterm. Although Tufte (1975 and 1978) had found that the growth rate of the economy in the midterm year had been an important component of the midterm referenda on the president's performance, later analyses found no significant direct economic effects on midterm seat losses (Campbell 1985, 1993; Erikson 1990). However, once the Republican long-term partisan change was taken into account, the direct effects of the economy on the midterm were discernible. The analysis indicated that every additional percentage point increase in economic conditions, as measured by the annual change in real disposable income per capita, the president's party reduced its seat losses by about 1.5 seats.

The analysis also offers evidence regarding the effects of long-term trends on partisan change. For some time it had been clear that some major long-term

changes were underway in the electorate, but the nature of that change was uncertain. Was it dealignment, or realignment, or perhaps both—a realigned system moved toward the Republicans, but a dealigned system in which partisanship mattered less? The history of recent presidential elections and the movement in the 1980s toward Republicans in party identification suggested that a realignment was underway; however, the evidence for congressional elections had not been so clear.[15] If a realignment had occurred in the 1970s or 1980s, then why did Democrats continue to hold the House and usually the Senate? Was it a two-tier realignment, a Republican presidential system and a Democratic majority below? Was it a hollow realignment, a system so dealigned with partisanship so weakened that a shift in the balance of partisans really did not amount to much? These interpretations and characterizations of long-term changes now seem to have been premature. The evidence suggests that a staggered realignment has been underway—a realignment developing rather quickly in presidential voting but taking some time to deepen into congressional politics. The congressional delay in the realignment results from the one-party tradition in the region of greatest potential change, the south. Dealignment was exaggerated for many reasons, including measurement error (Keith et al. 1992), but one important reason was the delayed realignment below the presidential level. Split-outcomes and divided government occurred not because of a permanent dealignment and voters' preferences for them, but (at least in part) because of the temporary effects of the developing, staggered realignment.

Until 1994, it had appeared as though surge-and-decline effects were weakening because of dealignment. The parties of recent presidents were not gaining

[15] Some insisted that Republican presidential victories in the 1970s and 1980s were idiosyncratic events, rather than evidence of a realignment. Nixon beat Humphrey in 1968 because Democrats were divided over Vietnam and Wallace further splintered the party. Nixon beat McGovern in 1972 because of massive campaign spending, dirty tricks, and a nonmainstream Democratic nominee. Things were back to normal in 1976 with Carter's election, but then his weak performance in office, the high "misery index," and the Iranian-hostage mess proved his undoing in 1980. Reagan won in 1984 because he was a likable, grandfatherly figure, the "Teflon™ president," the "great communicator," and not because the public favored his policies and views of government. Bush defeated Dukakis in 1988 because he ran a nasty campaign, Willie Horton ad and all, and because Dukakis ran a poor and uninspired campaign, then things returned to normal in 1992. In retrospect, these idiosyncratic explanations of recent presidential election history seem contorted. Republicans have won five of the last seven presidential elections. They have only lost when they have self-destructed (Watergate, reneging on the "read-my-lips" no-new-taxes pledge). It is much easier to explain and believe that two of the last seven elections have deviated from a normally Republican system than that five of the last seven have deviated from a majority Democratic system. In terms of party identification, Democrats had held their lead in party identification until the mid-1980s and then it began slipping away. The parties are now near parity in party identification and, since party identification is a lagging indicator of partisan change (particularly in a realignment driven by conversion rather than mobilization, as this one seems to be), conditions of voting habits are probably worse for Democrats than the party identification numbers currently reveal.

as many seats as their presidential surge indicated that they should. Neither were they losing as many seats in the midterm as the decline from the prior surge suggested. The oscillations of surge and decline seemed to be flattening. Dealignment and the increasing incumbency advantage seemed to explain the apparent weakening of the presidential pulse. According to my own estimates, surge-and-decline effects had weakened to about two-thirds of their prior strength (Campbell 1991, 1993). However, the staggered realignment is a second and now better-supported explanation.

A staggered Republican realignment explains both the apparent flattening of surge and decline and the results of the 1994 midterm. The Republicans under Reagan and Bush did not gain as many seats as their presidential surges expected because the gains that they should have been making, but were not, were in the formerly solid Democratic South and the South was in transition away from its Democratic tradition. Republicans were doing well at the presidential level but lacked a pool of serious congressional candidates to take advantage of favorable Republican conditions. Reagan in 1984 carried thirty-three Southern districts and Bush in 1988 carried twenty-four Southern districts that congressional Democrats won without Republican opposition (Campbell 1993, 194). In other districts carried by the Republican presidential candidates, Republicans mounted only token opposition in the congressional election. It appeared that Republican presidential candidates were wasting their coattails in these districts and they were; but there was more involved than wasting short-term gains. These were areas that could and would eventually become part of the Republican realignment once an adequate Republican infrastructure had developed. But for the 1984 and 1988 elections, the party was still under construction. Having failed to register the expected gains in the 1984 and 1988 on-years, the Republicans suffered smaller-than-expected losses in the 1986 and 1990 midterms. What appeared to be dealignment effects and muted presidential surges and declines were the results of the staggered realignment, a temporarily two-tiered system.

By 1992 the realignment had begun to deepen. Despite Clinton's presidential victory, Democrats lost eleven seats. Based on the presidential surge, they had been expected to gain about five seats. The presidential surge shortfall in 1992 could suggest either a weakening of the presidential surge and dealignment or a deepening of the Republican realignment. This ambiguity was dispelled with the unusually large midterm losses for the Democrats in 1994. Whereas the results of the previous three presidential and two midterm elections comport with either the dealignment or the staggered realignment story, the 1994 results do not. The 1994 results are inconsistent with the view of dealignment and a weakening presidential pulse but are, as the analysis demonstrated, quite consistent with a staggered and developing Republican realignment and a strong presidential pulse that continues to shape short-term electoral change from presidential to midterm elections.

APPENDIX A

THE REVISED THEORY OF SURGE AND DECLINE AND THE REPUBLICAN REALIGNMENT EFFECTS ON MIDTERM CHANGE IN U.S. HOUSE SEATS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, 1946–1994

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Seat Change for the Democratic Party in the Midterm Election
Prior Democratic Presidential Percentage Vote Margin	−2.50 (5.49)
Midterm Presidential Approval Rating (interaction with President's Party)	1.01 (5.07)
Midterm Economic Growth Rate (RDIPC) (interaction with President's Party)	1.47 (2.03)
1980 Republican Realignment (0 before 1980, 1 after 1980)	−19.93 (5.57)
The President's Party (0 for Republican, 1 for Democrat)	−146.97 (6.98)
Constant	74.30
Number of cases	13
R^2	.99
Adjusted R^2	.97
Standard error of estimate	5.69
Durbin-Watson statistic	2.62
Mean absolute error	3.16
Expected 1994 seat change	−54.30
1994 error (in seats)	2.30

Note: t-ratios are in parentheses. The dependent variable is the net number of seats gained or lost by the Democratic Party in the midterm election. The Democratic presidential vote margin variable is the percentage of the popular two-party vote cast in the prior presidential election for the Democratic presidential candidate minus 50 percent. The midterm presidential approval and midterm economic change variables are as described in the presidential party analysis (see Table 5) except that each is included with an interaction term for the president's party (+1 under Democratic administrations and −1 under Republicans). 1980 ***Republican Realignment*** is coded 0 before 1980 and 1 for elections thereafter. ***President's Party*** is coded 0 during Republican administrations and 1 under Democrats. Based on a simulation of expected midterm seat losses for a presidential party (with presidential popularity and the economy set at their mean values), the expected seat losses for the presidential party were nearly equal for Democratic and Republican presidents in similar circumstances prior to 1980. For example, if a Democratic president had won election with 55 percent of the vote, Democrats should have been expected to lose about 30 seats at the next midterm (prior to the realignment). If a Republican president had been elected by an identical 5 point margin, Republicans should have expected a midterm loss of about 32 seats (before 1980).

APPENDIX B

THE REVISED THEORY OF SURGE AND DECLINE AND THE REPUBLICAN REALIGNMENT EFFECTS ON MIDTERM CHANGE IN U.S. HOUSE VOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY, 1946–1994

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Congressional Vote Change for the President's Party in the Midterm Election
Prior Presidential Vote	−.24
Percentage for the In-Party	(4.56)
Midterm Presidential	.07
Approval Rating	(3.14)
Midterm Economic	.11
Growth Rate (RDIPC)	(1.42)
1984 Republican	−2.45
Realignment	(5.26)
Constant	5.43
Number of cases	13
R^2	.91
Adjusted R^2	.87
Standard error of estimate	.70
Durbin-Watson statistic	1.84
Mean absolute error	.48
Expected 1994 vote change	−6.73
1994 error (in percentage points of the vote)	.36

Note: *t*-ratios are in parentheses. The dependent variable is the actual percentage point change in the national House vote for the president's party in the midterm election. ***Prior Presidential Vote*** is the percentage of the popular two-party vote cast in the prior presidential election for the winning presidential candidate. ***Midterm Presidential Approval*** is the percentage of respondents in the Gallup Poll approving of the president's job performance at the time of the midterm election. ***Midterm Economic Growth Rate*** is the annual change in the real disposable income per capita (RDIPC), as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. 1984 ***Republican Realignment*** takes a value of −1 for Republican presidents in 1984 and thereafter and a value of +1 for Democratic presidents after 1984. Elections prior to 1984 have a score of zero on this variable.

Manuscript submitted 27 May 1996
Final manuscript received 24 September 1996

REFERENCES

Abramowitz, Alan I. 1994. Comments at a Roundtable on the 1994 Congressional Elections. Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta.

Abramowitz, Alan I. 1995. "The End of the Democratic Era? 1994 and the Future of Congressional Election Research." *Political Research Quarterly* 48:873–89.

Bean, Louis H. 1948. *How to Predict Elections.* New York: Knopf.

Bean, Louis H. 1950. *The Mid-Term Battle.* Washington, DC: Cantillion Books.

Born, Richard. 1984. "Reassessing the Decline of Presidential Coattails: U.S. House Elections from 1952–1980." *The Journal of Politics* 46:60–79.

Born, Richard. 1990. "Surge and Decline, Negative Voting, and the Midterm Loss Phenomenon: A Simultaneous Choice Analysis." *American Journal of Political Science* 34:615–45.

Bullock, Charles S. III. 1988. "Regional Realignment from an Officeholding Perspective." *The Journal of Politics* 50:553–74.

Campbell, Angus. 1960. "Surge and Decline: A Study of Electoral Change." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24:397–418.

Campbell, James E. 1985. "Explaining Presidential Losses in Midterm Congressional Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 47:1140–57.

Campbell, James E. 1986. "Predicting Seat Gains from Presidential Coattails." *American Journal of Political Science* 30:165–83.

Campbell, James E. 1991. "The Presidential Surge and Its Midterm Decline in Congressional Elections, 1868–1988." *The Journal of Politics* 53:477–87.

Campbell, James E. 1992. "The Presidential Pulse of Congressional Elections, 1868–1988." In *The Atomistic Congress,* ed. Allen D. Hertzke and Ronald M. Peters Jr. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Campbell, James E. 1993. *The Presidential Pulse of Congressional Elections.* Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Campbell, James E. 1994a. Comments at a Roundtable on the 1994 Congressional Elections. Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta.

Campbell, James E. 1994b. "Reading the GOP's Tea Leaves." *The Washington Times,* November 6, B5.

Campbell, James E. 1996. *Cheap Seats: The Democratic Party's Advantage in U.S. House Elections.* Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.

Campbell, James E. N.d. *The Presidential Pulse of Congressional Elections.* 2d ed. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, forthcoming.

Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Congressional Quarterly. 1985. *Guide to U.S. Elections.* 2d ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly.

Congressional Quarterly. 1989. "Official 1988 Presidential Election Results." *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (January 21):139.

Congressional Quarterly. 1993. "Official 1992 Presidential Election Results." *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (January 30):233.

Erikson, Robert S. 1990. "Economic Conditions and the Congressional Vote: A Review of Macrolevel Evidence." *American Journal of Political Science* 34:373–99.

Ferejohn, John A., and Randall L. Calvert. 1984. "Presidential Coattails in Historical Perspective." *American Journal of Political Science* 28:127–46.

Fiorina, Morris P. 1990. "The Electorate's View of the Parties." In *The Parties Respond,* ed. L. Sandy Maisel. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Frymer, Paul. 1996. "The 1994 Electoral Aftershock: Dealignment or Realignment in the South." In *Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context,* ed. Philip A. Klinkner. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Jacobson, Gary C. 1990. "Does the Economy Matter in Midterm Elections?" *American Journal of Political Science* 34:400–404.

Jacobson, Gary C. 1996. "The 1994 House Elections in Perspective." In *Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context,* ed. Philip A. Klinkner. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Keith, Bruce E., David B. Magleby, Candice J. Nelson, Elizabeth Orr, Mark C. Westlye, and Raymond E. Wolfinger. 1992. *The Myth of the Independent Voter.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Kernell, Samuel. 1977. "Presidential Popularity and Negative Voting: An Alternative Explanation of the Midterm Congressional Decline of the President's Party." *American Political Science Review* 71:44–66.

Ladd, Everett Carll. 1989. "The 1988 Elections: Continuation of the Post-New Deal System." *Political Science Quarterly* 104:1–18.

Ladd, Everett Carll. 1993. "The 1992 Vote for President Clinton: Another Brittle Mandate." *Political Science Quarterly* 108:1–28.

Ladd, Everett Carll, ed. 1995a. *America at the Polls 1994.* Storrs, CT: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

Ladd, Everett Carll. 1995b. "The 1994 Congressional Elections: The Postindustrial Realignment Continues." *Political Science Quarterly* 110:1–23.

Lewis-Beck, Michael S. 1994. Comments at a Roundtable on the 1994 Congressional Elections. Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta.

Lewis-Beck, Michael S., and Tom W. Rice. 1984. "Forecasting U.S. House Elections." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 9:475–86.

Miller, Warren E. 1991. "Party Identification, Realignment, and Party Voting: Back to the Basics." *American Political Science Review* 85:557–68.

Miller, Warren E., and Santa A. Traugott. 1989. *American National Election Studies Data Sourcebook, 1952–1986.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Oppenheimer, Bruce I., James A. Stimson, and Richard W. Waterman. 1986. "Interpreting U.S. Congressional Elections: The Exposure Thesis." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 11:227–47.

Ornstein, Norman J., Thomas E. Mann, Michael J. Malbin, with Amy Schenkenberg. 1996. *Vital Statistics on Congress, 1995–1996.* Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Petrocik, John R. 1987. "Realignment: New Party Coalitions and the Nationalization of the South." *The Journal of Politics* 49:347–75.

Rosenstone, Steven J., Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus. 1996. *Third Parties in America.* 2d ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rousseeuw, P., and A. Leroy. 1987. *Robust Regression and Outlier Detection.* New York: Wiley.

Stanley, Harold W. 1988. "Southern Partisan Changes: Dealignment, Realignment or Both?" *The Journal of Politics* 50:64–88.

Tufte, Edward R. 1975. "Determinants of the Outcomes of Midterm Congressional Elections." *American Political Science Review* 69:812–26.

Tufte, Edward R. 1978. *Political Control of the Economy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1995. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995–1996.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. 1989. *National Income and Product Accounts of the United States.* 2 vols. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Waterman, Richard W., Bruce I. Oppenheimer and James A. Stimson. 1991. "Sequence and Equilibrium in Congressional Elections: An Integrated Approach." *The Journal of Politics* 53:373–93.

Wattenberg, Martin. 1990. *The Decline of American Political Parties: 1952–1988.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wattenberg, Martin. 1991. *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics: Presidential Elections in the 1980s.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

James E. Campbell is professor of political science, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-5433.