

14. SURGE AND DECLINE: THE NATIONAL EVIDENCE

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In presidential election years, congressional candidates of the party winning the presidency have an advantage over their opponents. Metaphorically, some of these congressional candidates ride their presidential candidate's coattails into office. Two years later at the midterm, however, presidential coattails are unavailable. As a result, the presidential party loses congressional votes and seats. In essence, midterm elections are, at least in part, repercussions from the previous presidential election.

The Revised Theory of Surge and Decline

The revised theory of surge and decline, building on Angus Campbell's original theory (Campbell, 1960), offers an explanation of how the temporary surge of support for the winning presidential party and its subsequent midterm decline play out in the behavior of citizens, in their decision of whether to vote, and in their choice of which candidate to support. The elements of the revised theory of surge and decline are set forth in Figure 14-1 for three segments of the potential electorate—independents, advantaged and disadvantaged partisans.

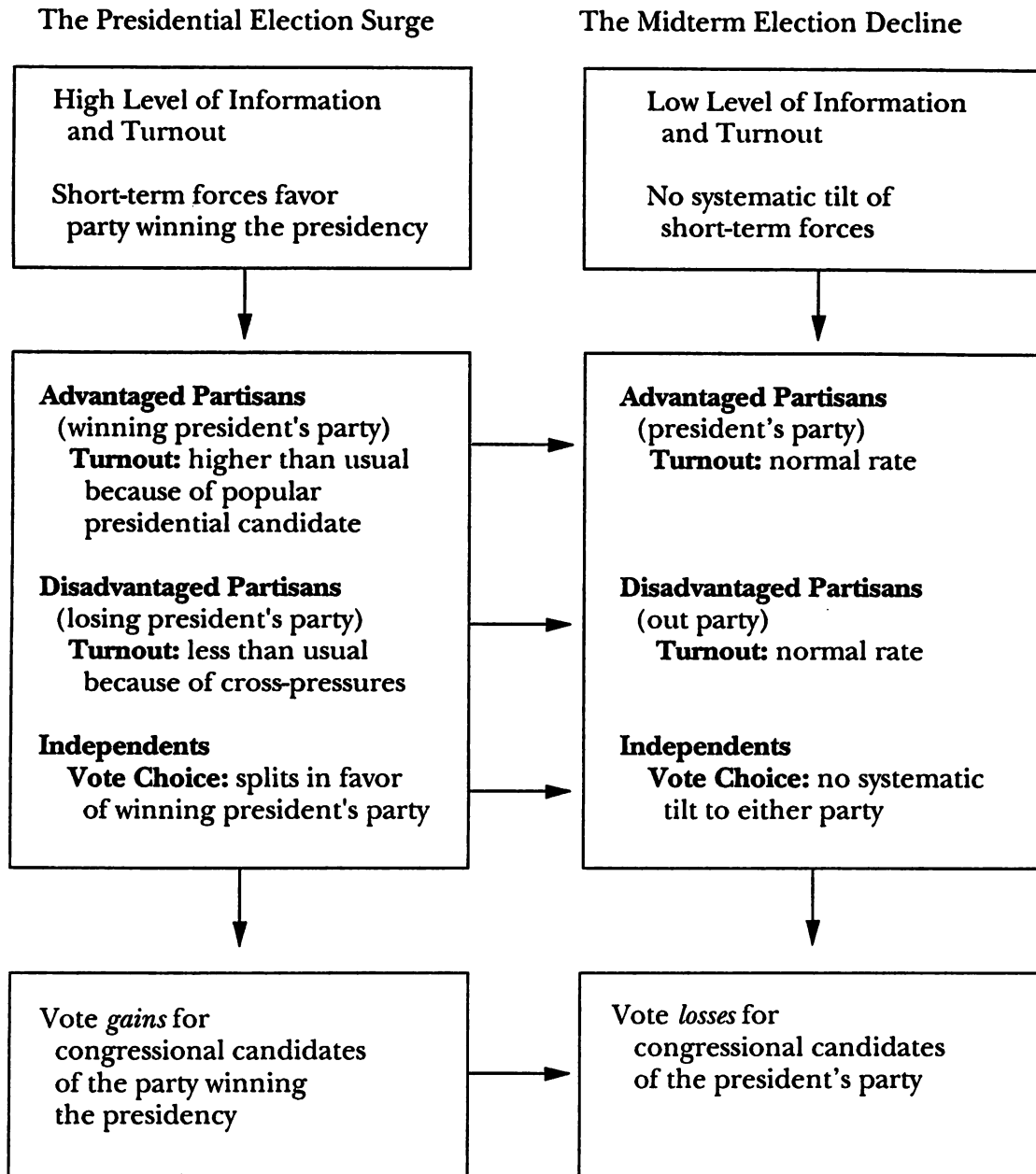
Sources of the Surge

In presidential election years, according to the theory, the short-term forces (reactions to candidates and issues) favoring the winning presidential party are translated into a surge of votes for that party in two ways. *Short-term forces manifest themselves in the vote choices of independents and in the turnout of partisans.*

Independents are the most open of all voters to campaign influence. Their perceptions of the campaign—its candidates, issues and events—are likely to be less biased than others, and these perceptions affect evaluations of the parties, evaluations that are nearly neutral at the campaign's outset. Given this, it is quite

Source: Adapted from James E. Campbell, *Congressional Elections: The Presidential Pulse* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993).

Figure 14-1 The Revised Surge and Decline Sequence



likely that for independents the campaign makes the difference between voting for Democrats or voting for Republicans. Since campaign influences systematically favor the party able to win the presidential race, independents cast a disproportionate share of their votes for the congressional candidates of the winning presidential party (even with the currently high rates of ticket-splitting).

Partisans contribute to presidential coattails or the presidential surge primarily through their turnout decisions. Within the general rise in turnout associated with a highly charged presidential election, there are systematic differences in the turnout of the two parties. Partisans of the advantaged party,

the party winning the presidency, should turn out at *higher* than expected rates because of their enthusiasm for their party's popular standard-bearer. Those in the disadvantaged or losing party in presidential elections, on the other hand, may be expected to turn out at a *lower* than usual rate because of cross-pressures. A significant number of disadvantaged partisans feel cross-pressured, pulled one way because of loyalty to their party and in the opposite direction by short-term positive evaluations of the opposing party and its more popular presidential candidate. These voters face the unpleasant choice of reluctantly voting for their party's unpopular presidential candidate or reluctantly defecting from their party to vote for the opposition's candidate. Given this dilemma, many may simply decide not to vote.¹ The result is a partisan turnout gap. The winning presidential party wins, in part, because of an especially heavy turnout of its own partisans and a lighter than otherwise expected turnout among opposition partisans.

One important caveat about the contribution of partisan defections to the presidential election surge is in order. Partisan defections may also contribute and, on occasion, contribute significantly to the surge. Defections are likely to make the greatest difference in landslide presidential elections. Most partisans do not defect easily. Defection is an extreme response. Most partisans give their party the benefit of the doubt. A certain amount of displeasure with their party can be tolerated or even avoided by nonvoting, but all partisans have a breaking point beyond which they are provoked to defection. When it becomes obvious to most that a party has put forward the inferior offering—as voters themselves judge to be the case of a party on the short side of a landslide—a significant number of its partisans may be driven past the point of mere abstention to outright defection (see Boyd, 1969; DeVoursney, 1977).

Variations in the Decline

In the midterm, with short-term forces diminished and less systematically advantageous to it, support for the president's party and its congressional candidates declines. The extent of this decline depends in part on the extent of the prior surge of support for the party. The independent vote advantage and the partisan turnout advantage are greatest for the president's party in presidential elections in which short-term forces are most strongly in its favor, in landslides. It follows that the loss of both temporary advantages would be most deeply felt by the president's party in midterms following these strong surge presidential elections.

The strength of the prior presidential election surge, however, is not the only factor affecting the extent of the midterm decline for the president's party. Although the revised theory contends that national short-term forces are somewhat weaker and less systematic with respect to the president's party in midterm elections than in presidential elections, national short-term forces in midterm elections are by no means inconsequential. Midterm elections are also in part referenda on the performance of the president (Tufte, 1975, 1978; Campbell, 1985). A popular president can shorten his party's midterm fall and an unpopular president can lengthen it. The president's party may lose less of its independent vote advantage and its partisan turnout differential advantage if the

president is very popular at the midterm. Favorable midterm short-term forces, presumably expressed in support for the president, may continue to attract independent votes, sustain enthusiasm among the president's partisans, encouraging them to turn out, and maintain cross-pressures among the opposition's partisans, discouraging them from turning out.

While the referenda aspect of the midterm affects the extent of midterm losses, even in the best of circumstances it does not turn potential losses into gains. A positive midterm referendum for the president's party means only that its losses are less than they would have been otherwise. The midterm referendum is unable to pull the president's party into the gain column because the effects of the midterm are circumscribed by the low stimulus character of the nonpresidential campaign. Whether the president is very popular or unpopular, he is not on the ballot and is not engaged in an aggressive campaign. Midterm elections lack not only the intensity of presidential campaigns but the *explicit* focal point of presidential campaigns. As such, though the midterm is undoubtedly in part a referendum on the president, it is a *muted* referendum.

Evidence from National Elections

Since the theory of surge and decline was originally proposed to explain national midterm losses of the president's party, an appropriate starting point in examining the revised theory is to determine how well it explains the pattern of national electoral change.²

There are three parts to this analysis of national evidence. The first examines national evidence of the midterm decline. How well does the revised theory explain variation in both midterm seat and vote losses for the president's party? The second part examines evidence of the presidential surge in the prior presidential election. According to the theory, an initial presidential-year surge sets up the subsequent midterm year decline. Evidence of the presidential surge is as important to the theory as evidence of the midterm decline. How well does the theory explain variation in partisan seat and vote changes in the prior presidential election years? The tracks of presidential election short-term forces, factors generally benefitting the winning presidential party, ought to be evident in the congressional election results of the prior presidential election year. The third part examines how both presidential surge and midterm decline effects have changed over time. Have surge and decline effects weakened? Do they still exist in contemporary elections or are they only a matter of electoral history?

The theory of surge and decline, in both its original and revised forms, claims to explain the consistency as well as the variation in presidential midterm losses. Before proceeding to analyze variation in midterm losses, we ought to make note of the obvious common thread running through all midterm seat and vote losses by the president's party—they happen to the president's party, the party that won the presidency in the prior election. The president's party may or may not be popular at the midterm and it may or may not have a healthy economy after two years in office, but it has always won the prior presidential election. This pattern of presidential victories followed quite consistently by

congressional midterm losses (29 of 30 midterms from 1868 to 1990) does not necessarily indicate the validity of surge and decline. However, it lends some additional credibility. We now turn to the national level evidence of partisan seat and vote change in midterms. How well does "surge and decline" stand up to the evidence?

Explaining Midterm Losses

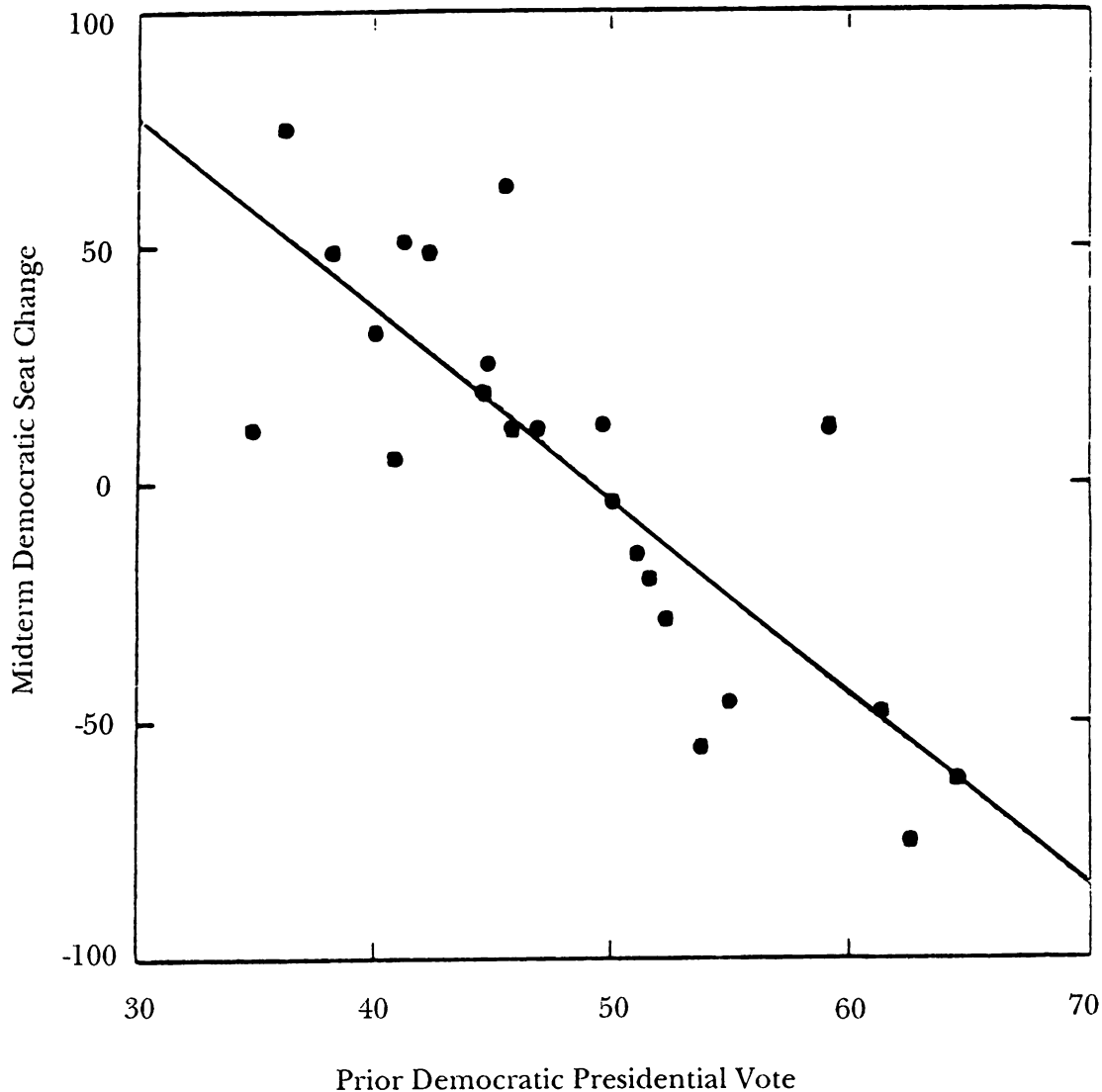
According to surge and decline, midterm seat and vote losses should be proportional to the short-term forces favoring the president's party in the prior presidential election. In normal times (without a critical realignment), the direction and force of short-term forces can be measured as the presidential vote. Examining even crude evidence of midterm decline effects, one can observe that midterm seat losses are, as expected, substantially greater following presidential landslides (Campbell, 1993, chap. 3). The following analysis examines evidence of *both* midterm seat and vote losses in greater depth, with greater precision and statistical reliability.

Before proceeding to the data, we should note that surge and decline in its revised form claims that while midterm losses are largely a function of the prior presidential surge, they are not solely a function of that surge. They are also affected by the public's evaluations of the in-party at the midterm itself (Tuft, 1975). Midterms are in part referenda on the president's performance and his party's performance. While the analysis will take this referenda adjustment to the midterm decline into account, the analysis begins by examining only the midterm repercussions of the presidential election surge. This initially more restricted analysis permits an examination of a longer series of elections, since Gallup poll approval ratings of the president measuring the public's midterm evaluations have only been available since 1946.

The Basic Association. The analysis begins by examining the fundamental association between the short-term forces of the presidential election, as captured by the presidential vote, and the change in the number of seats won by each party after the midterm election. Figure 14-2 displays midterm Democratic *seat* gains or losses plotted against the Democratic share of the two-party presidential vote in the prior presidential election for the 23 midterms between 1900 and 1990. The number of seats held by the Democrats at each election are calculated from the series in Ornstein, Mann and Malbin (1990). For the sake of comparability, the number of seats won or lost in the early elections of this century are adjusted to reflect a House size of 435 members. The number of congressional seats grew until 1912 and has since been set at 435. Seats held by third parties (primarily in elections early in the series) are equally divided between the two major parties, again for purposes of comparison.

As is apparent from the figure, a party's midterm fate is cast by how well it did in the prior presidential election. The plot indicates a strong negative association between a party's presidential vote and the change in its share of seats and votes in the subsequent midterm, much as anticipated by both the original and revised theory of surge and decline. A companion analysis of midterm

Figure 14-2 Midterm Congressional Seat Change and the Prior Presidential Vote, 1902-1990



congressional vote change produces essentially the same negative and expected plot (Campbell, 1993, chap. 6).

Regression Analyses. Regression analysis offers a more rigorous assessment of the basic proposition of a negative association between the prior presidential vote and the following midterm loss of congressional votes and seats. There are two dependent variables. The first is the midterm change in the number of seats (adjusted to a constant House size of 435) held by Democrats. The second is the midterm change in the Democratic party's share of the congressional vote. Different regression analyses are performed on both of these dependent variables to ensure the reliability of the findings. In both the seat change and vote change regressions, the independent variable of principal interest

is the Democratic presidential vote, a measure of the general direction and magnitude of short-term forces in the prior presidential election year.³

For both the seat change and vote change dependent variables, four separate regression analyses are conducted. The two sets of regressions, one with vote change as the dependent variable and one with seat change, are identical in all ways. The differences among these regressions are intended to take into account the idiosyncratic aspects of several of the elections and changes in electoral volatility or stability over time. The first regression of both sets examines all midterm elections from 1902 to 1990 ($n = 23$). This regression involves only a single independent variable, the prior Democratic presidential vote.

The second regression is conducted on the same series of elections but includes a dummy variable for the New Deal realignment midterm of 1934 (1 in 1934 and 0 otherwise), a midterm that there is good reason to believe was quite atypical. This variable should, in an admittedly rough way, control for the jolt of the critical New Deal realignment.⁴

The third regression *excludes* four pairs of presidential and midterm elections in which nonmajor party presidential candidates received a significant vote. Presumably, a party's share of the two-party presidential vote would not as accurately reflect the tilt of short-term forces when there is a large third-party vote. The two-party presidential vote implicitly assumes that the popular sentiment behind third-party votes is proportionate to the vote division between the two major-party candidates. However, in some cases, this may be an erroneous assumption. The error would be especially severe when most of the third-party vote would have gone to the losing major-party presidential candidate and when the proportion of the total vote going to the minor parties is large. Given this potential source of error, presidential elections in which the Democrats and Republicans jointly received less than 93 percent of the total presidential vote were excluded from the third regression. Excluded are 1912-14 because of Theodore Roosevelt's second place finish in the popular vote; 1924-26 because of Robert LaFollette's 17 percent of the vote; 1968-70 because of George Wallace's 14 percent; and 1980-82 largely because of John Anderson's 6.6 percent of the vote. After excluding these potentially confounding cases, the third regression with the single independent variable of the Democratic presidential vote is estimated on the remaining nineteen elections. The fourth regression examines these same major-party elections, but includes the New Deal dummy variable along with the Democratic presidential vote. The regression results for the seat change and vote change analyses are presented in Tables 14-1 and 14-2, respectively.⁵

Both sets of national seat change and vote change regressions strongly support surge and decline claims about midterm losses. All estimates of the midterm repercussions of the presidential vote consistently lead to the same conclusion: *a party's congressional midterm losses are proportional to its presidential vote in the previous presidential election.* The estimated effects of the presidential vote on the extent of midterm seat and vote losses remain strong under a variety of specifications and over the different series of examined elections. Whether or not all elections are included in the analysis and whether or

Table 14-1 The Presidential Vote's Effect on Midterm Change in the Democratic Congressional Vote, 1902-1990

Independent Variables	<i>Dependent Variable: Change in the Democratic Congressional Vote from the Presidential to the Midterm Election</i>			
	<i>All Midterm Elections Included</i>		<i>Third-Party Elections Excluded</i>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Prior Democratic presidential vote	-.45 (6.77)	-.49 (7.39)	-.54 (8.83)	-.60 (12.69)
New Deal	—	4.94 (1.86)	—	6.34 (3.96)
Constant	21.73	23.19	25.66	28.37
Number of cases	23	23	19	19
R^2	.69	.73	.82	.91
Adjusted R^2	.67	.71	.81	.90
Standard error	2.63	2.49	2.00	1.47
Mean absolute error	1.98	1.75	1.51	1.17

Note: t-ratios are in parentheses. The Democratic presidential and congressional votes are the Democratic share of the two-party vote. The New Deal variable is a dummy taking on a value of 1 for 1934 and zero otherwise. The significant third-party elections excluded from regressions 3 and 4 are 1912, 1924, 1968, and 1980.

not the New Deal realignment jolt is taken into account, a two percentage point gain in a party's presidential vote is associated with about a one percentage point loss in its midterm congressional vote ($b = -.45$ to $-.60$). In terms of seats, a one percentage point increase in the presidential vote sets the party up to sustain a loss of four to five seats in the next midterm ($b = -4.06$ to -5.31). In all eight regressions over the century, the coefficients are at least five times their standard errors (easily surpassing conventional significance levels) and, moreover, each regression estimated accounts for no less than two-thirds of the variance in the Democratic party's midterm change in votes or seats.

The Referenda Component. The revised theory of surge and decline argues that midterm changes are *not entirely* repercussions of the presidential surge but are a result of the withdrawal of the strong and positive short-term forces of the prior presidential election year and the public's midterm judgment of the administration's performance. Much goes on in the midterm election itself that undoubtedly has national partisan ramifications. Sometimes the midterm

Table 14-2 The Presidential Vote's Effect on Midterm Change in Democratic House Seats, 1902-1990

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Change in the Democratic Congressional Seats from the Presidential to the Midterm Election</i>			
	<i>All Midterm Elections Included</i>		<i>Third-Party Elections Excluded</i>	
	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>
Prior Democratic presidential vote	-4.06 (6.58)	-4.48 (7.86)	-4.63 (6.45)	-5.31 (8.81)
New Deal	—	59.72 (2.61)	—	68.35 (3.35)
Constant	199.03	216.65	227.85	257.03
Number of cases	23	23	19	19
R^2	.67	.76	.71	.83
Adjusted R^2	.66	.73	.69	.81
Standard error	24.27	21.48	23.68	18.72
Mean absolute error	17.02	14.57	16.41	11.94

Note: t-ratios are in parentheses. The Democratic presidential vote is the Democratic share of the two-party vote. The number of seats has been adjusted to a constant House size of 435 seats. Seats held by third parties have been divided equally between the two major parties for comparability across years. The New Deal variable is a dummy taking on a value of 1 for 1934 and zero otherwise. The significant third-party elections excluded from regressions 3 and 4 are 1912, 1924, 1968, and 1980.

climate hurts the president's party. For instance, it is hard to imagine that the Watergate scandal, President Nixon's resignation and subsequent pardon by President Ford within three months of the 1974 midterm, failed to hurt Republican congressional candidates. In a more mundane "crisis," it is a good bet that Democrats in 1946 were hurt by the public's displeasure with meat shortages caused by post-war price controls. *Newsweek* (October 21, 1946, p. 31) reported that President Truman attempted to diffuse the issue by decontrolling meat prices just three weeks before the election, but the damage had already been done. In other midterms, the political climate is favorable to the president's party. For instance, it is difficult to believe that Democrats in 1962 were not helped greatly in November's election by President Kennedy's handling of October's Cuban missile crisis. While each midterm does not have an issue of this intensity associated with it, the prevailing political climate of any midterm adds to or subtracts from the losses the president's party are positioned to sustain by the prior presidential election.

The fully specified midterm equation, incorporating the midterm referenda perspective into the analysis, includes three independent variables: the prior presidential vote, the public's approval rating of the president, and the annual change in real disposable income. The analysis of this full midterm equation is conducted on the twelve midterms from 1946 to 1990 since the midterm approval ratings or presidential popularity measure, obtained from Gallup surveys, is only available since 1946. The variables in this portion of the analysis are oriented in terms of the presidential party rather than in terms of Democrats and Republicans in order to simplify the interpretation of the two variables measuring the referenda evaluations of the in-party. The full midterm equation is estimated for both the midterm congressional vote and seat change. Since significant negative autocorrelation was found in the initial OLS regressions, a companion regression was estimated after taking first differences of all variables with their lagged values.⁶ The regression estimates are presented in Table 14-3.

Several aspects of these results deserve note. First, consistent with the findings above and the expectations of the revised theory, the presidential vote has the expected significant and negative effect on both midterm vote and seat changes after controlling for possible referenda effects. Every percentage point added to the presidential vote margin sets the stage for nearly two-tenths of a percentage point drop in the party's midterm congressional vote and a loss of about two seats.⁷

Second, consistent with both the midterm referenda research (Tufte, 1978) as well as the revised theory of surge and decline, presidential popularity has a significant positive effect on both midterm vote and seat changes for the president's party. Presidents popular at the midterm are able to cut their party's losses. A one percentage point increase in approval ratings cut congressional vote losses by about one-tenth of a percentage point and saved one seat from being lost.

The third finding from Table 14-3 was not expected. Although the estimated effects of economic growth on midterm vote and seat changes were positive, as expected, in neither case were they statistically significant (see Erikson, 1990; Jacobson, 1990a), though they approached significance in the first difference equations.⁸ This does *not* mean that economics are irrelevant to midterm changes. There is substantial research to indicate that economic change matters. However, there is reason to believe that it matters somewhat less than some have supposed; that its effects occur earlier in the process and these effects are more indirect in nature (Campbell, 1993, chap. 4). There is a good deal of other research to show that the health of the economy may influence midterm change by affecting presidential approval ratings and that this effect has some significant lag associated with it (Campbell, 1985, p. 1148; Norpoth and Yantek, 1983; Jacobson and Kernell, 1981; Monroe, 1979). Presidents get credit for prosperity and take the blame for recession but the public is not so attentive as to grant credit or place blame immediately.

Two cases illustrate the point: 1946 and 1982. In both cases the economy went into recession before the midterm. These recessions were translated into political terms. The public assigned blame for the economic downturns to the incumbent administrations. Truman's approval rating among the public sank to a

Table 14-3 The Presidential Vote and Midterm Referenda Effects on Midterm Change in Congressional Votes and Seats for the President's Party, 1946-1990

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
	<i>Vote Change</i>		<i>Seat Change</i>	
	<i>OLS</i>	<i>First Differences</i>	<i>OLS</i>	<i>First Differences</i>
Prior presidential vote	-.21 (2.02)	-.21 (4.93)	-2.26 (2.42)	-2.47 (5.71)
Midterm presidential popularity	.11 (2.79)	.10 (4.17)	1.11 (3.15)	1.15 (4.77)
Midterm economic change	.06 (.35)	.11 (1.67)	1.23 (.88)	1.20 (1.74)
Constant	2.04	.30	37.58	1.25
Number of cases	12	11	12	11
R^2	.63	.91	.71	.93
Adjusted R^2	.48	.88	.61	.90
Standard error	1.36	.94	11.99	9.69
Mean absolute error	.86	.56	7.60	5.51

Note: t-ratios are in parentheses. First difference estimates are based on taking the difference of each variable's value with its lagged value and using these differences in place of the simple variables.

mere 32 percent and Reagan's rating dropped to just 42 percent. With the leaders of the parties in disrepute, owing in no small part to the state of the economy, both parties suffered substantially greater midterm losses.

While it is now clear that midterm losses are a product of *both* the withdrawal of the prior presidential surge and the public's midterm referenda appraisal of the administration's performance, which matters more? This is not as easy a question to answer as it might seem. On the one hand, the effect of a one percentage point change in the prior presidential vote is two to three times as great as the effect of a one percentage point change in midterm presidential approval ratings. On the other hand, presidential approval ratings are more than twice as variable as the presidential vote margin. That is, a two percentage point change in presidential approval ratings is about as likely as a one percentage point change in the winning presidential vote margin.

While it might be tempting to conclude simply that the two effects are of approximately equal strength, we should remember that in orienting the analysis

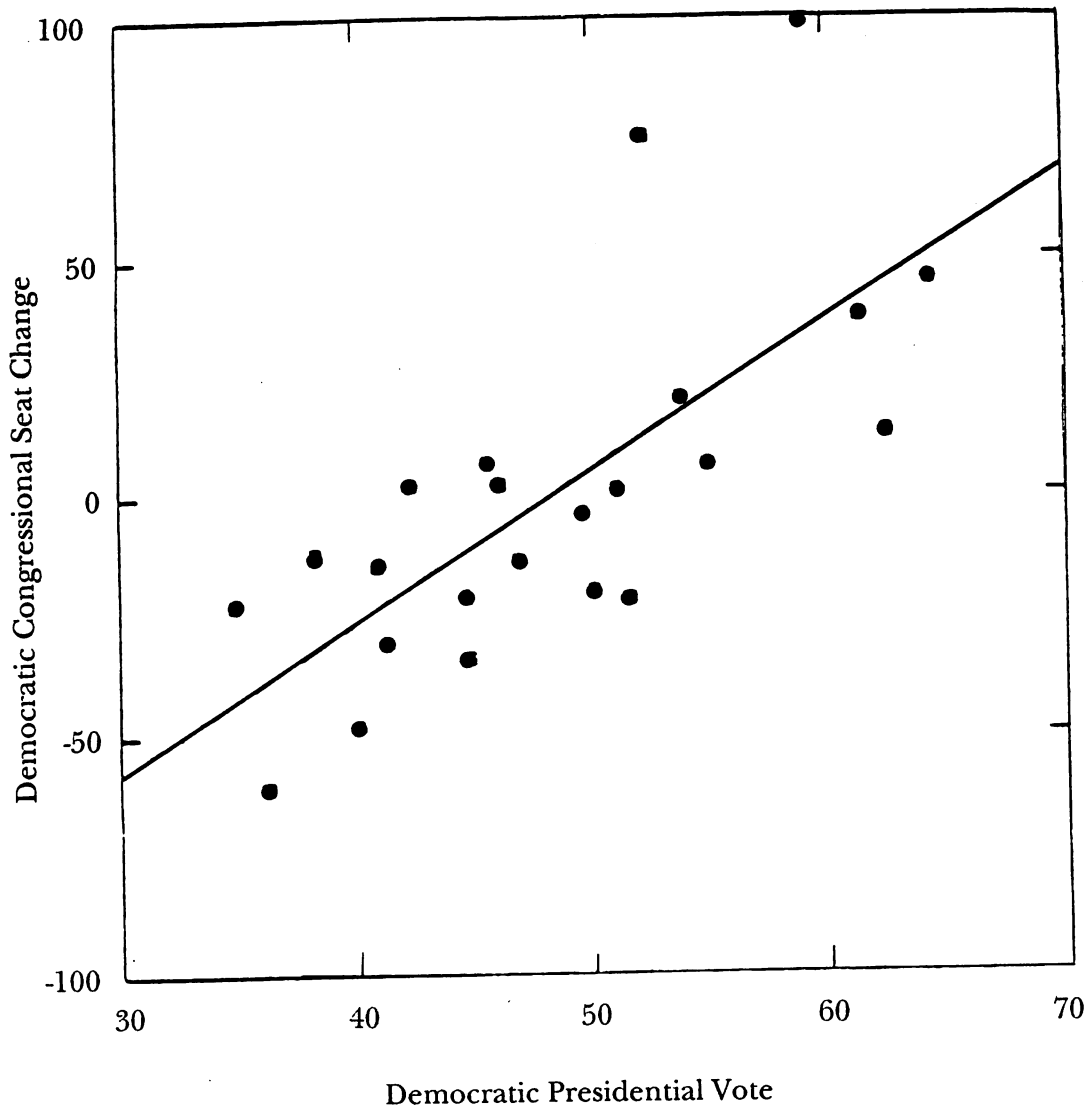
in terms of the president's party the variance of the presidential vote has been artificially restricted. Unlike either major party's popular vote, the presidential vote of the winning presidential party effectively has a lower bound of 50 percent. This restricted variation is reflected in the standard deviations of the two votes. While a standard deviation of the presidential vote of the winning party in this period was 4.1 percentage points of the vote, the standard deviation of the Democratic and Republican presidential votes was 6.4 percentage points. Moreover, this restricted variance attenuates the estimated effect of the presidential vote. This attenuation is evident in estimating the simple bivariate equations in Tables 14-1 and 14-2 both ways, orienting variables in terms of the Democratic and Republican parties and in terms of the winning and losing presidential parties. Both sets of regressions were estimated over the same set of post-war elections (1946-90). The estimated effects of the winning presidential candidates' vote were substantially greater ($-.60$ versus $-.23$ in the vote change equations and -4.57 versus -2.51 in the seat change equations) when variables were oriented in terms of the Democratic and Republican parties rather than the winning and losing presidential parties.

If we proceed on the premise that the earlier estimates of presidential vote effect (oriented by Democratic and Republican parties) are more appropriate (in displaying the true variation in the presidential vote) as well as more accurate (unattenuated compared to the later estimates), the presidential vote would appear to be more influential in midterm seat and vote changes than the midterm referendum. The presidential year short-term forces, measured by the presidential vote, not only account for a party being in the midterm win or loss column, but greatly affect the size of the gains or losses. Dividing the question of midterm change into its two components, the consistency and variability of presidential party losses, it now seems clear that the president's party consistently loses in the midterm because of the prior presidential surge; its losses vary a good deal because the public's midterm judgments vary, but also, at least as importantly, because the magnitude of the prior presidential surge varies.

Finding Prior Presidential Gains

Given the above findings of midterm decline effects, we ought to find the mirror-image surge effects in the previous presidential election years. Both versions of surge and decline contend that congressional elections in on-years are affected by presidential coattails or, at least, short-term causes that affect both presidential and congressional elections. As an examination of seat changes in landslide and non-landslide presidential election years suggests (Campbell, 1993, chap. 3), presidential coattails, or something like them, exist. The winning president's party is more likely to gain seats and gain more seats in landslide elections.

The Basic Association. Democratic seat changes in presidential election years are plotted against the Democratic share of the two-party presidential vote in Figure 14-3. The generally positive association between a party's presidential vote and the change in its congressional fortunes is clearly suggested by the plot

Figure 14-3 Congressional Seat Change and the Presidential Vote, 1900-1988

and appears as well in a companion analysis of on-year congressional vote gains (Campbell, 1993, chap. 6). A more precise reading of this relationship is offered by regression analysis.

Regression Analyses. As in the examination of midterm losses, the analysis of presidential election years considers four different regressions for both seat and vote changes. Two equations examine all elections in this century. Two equations exclude from this series those four elections in which there was a substantial third-party presidential vote. Like the midterm analysis, two of the equations also control for the relatively abrupt change in the partisan base caused by the New Deal realignment.

There is one difference in the presidential year equations other than the

expectation of a positive effect of the presidential vote. That difference is the inclusion of the party's initial vote or seat share going into the presidential election, its percentage of the congressional vote or number of House seats held after the prior midterm election. The rationale for the inclusion of a party's initial holdings is that it is more difficult to gain votes or seats when a party already holds a large proportion of them. A party cannot gain what it already has. At the extreme, it is impossible for a party having previously won all votes and seats to do any better. Conversely, at the other extreme, it is impossible for a party without votes or seats to lose. Between these extremes, a party holding a large majority of votes and seats would do well just to hold that majority. It might do well and still lose votes and seats if it just isn't quite as popular as it had been. A party with a minority of votes and seats doing just as well in its next election ought to expect to register gains. Given this logic, a party's initial vote and seat holdings ought to be *negatively* associated with vote and seat changes. This initial holding variable will be included in three of the regressions.⁹

Tables 14-4 and 14-5 present the presidential year regression results for congressional vote change and seat change. The single most important finding here is that, regardless of the election series considered or the additional variables included in the analyses, *in presidential election years a party gains both seats and votes in proportion to its presidential vote*. The results are strong, consistent, statistically significant and support the theory of surge and decline. For every additional percentage point of the presidential vote, the party can expect typically to gain approximately two-fifths of a percentage point in the national congressional vote and better than three House seats. There are essentially no differences among estimates of the presidential vote coefficients in the vote change analysis and only very slight differences in the seat change analysis, a range of just one-quarter of a seat ($b = 3.16$ to 3.43). Moreover, the equations fit the data quite well, accounting for between about one-half and three-fourths of the variation in on-year seat and vote changes. The coefficients are nearly four to more than six times their standard errors and easily surpass conventional standards of statistical significance.

While not integral to the surge and decline proposition, the two "control" variables, the New Deal realignment variable and the prior congressional holdings variable, had their expected effects. As a result of the New Deal realignment, Democrats won an additional 5 percentage points of the congressional vote and about 61 or 62 more seats. Also, as expected, a party's initial seat and vote holdings reduced any expected gains it might have made. For every additional percentage point of the congressional vote it had won before the presidential year election, its expected vote gains were reduced by about a third of a percentage point. Initial seat holdings also limited seat gains. Every four additional seats held prior to the election reduced potential seat gains by one seat. While the inclusion of these "control" variables did not, as noted above, clarify or significantly alter estimates of the surge effects, they did contribute to more completely accounting for variation in both seat and vote changes.

Table 14-4 The Presidential Vote's Effect on Presidential Year Change in the Democratic Congressional Vote, 1900-1988

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Change in the Democratic Congressional Vote from the Prior Midterm to the Presidential Election</i>			
	<i>All Presidential Elections Included</i>		<i>Third-Party Elections Excluded</i>	
	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>
Democratic presidential vote	.40 (5.61)	.40 (6.70)	.41 (4.40)	.39 (4.86)
New Deal	—	5.15 (2.13)	—	5.15 (1.85)
Prior Democratic congressional vote	—	-.31 (2.71)	—	-.30 (2.30)
Constant	-19.16	-3.58	-19.47	-3.38
Number of cases	23	23	19	19
R^2	.60	.79	.53	.75
Adjusted R^2	.58	.76	.51	.70
Standard error	2.82	2.15	3.09	2.40
Mean absolute error	2.17	1.43	2.45	1.64

Note: t-ratios are in parentheses. The Democratic presidential and congressional votes are the Democratic share of the two-party vote. The New Deal variable is a dummy taking on a value of 1 for 1932 and zero otherwise. The significant third-party elections excluded from regressions 3 and 4 are 1912, 1924, 1968, and 1980. The prior Democratic congressional vote is the party's share of the vote in the previous midterm.

Surge and Decline Over Time

While the above analysis indicates that national electoral change in both presidential and midterm elections in the twentieth century has been generally consistent with the theories of surge and decline, the question remains as to whether surge and decline structures electoral change in recent elections as it has in the past. Is the process of surge and decline a relic of the past, when parties were parties and their congressmen hung on to their presidential candidate's coattails for dear life? Have local or district factors such as incumbency, campaign spending by the candidates and the relative appeal of congressional candidates come to dominate congressional races to such an extent that presidential coattails are no longer relevant?

To assess the possible change in surge and decline effects, the presidential and midterm change equations were reestimated on three subsets of presidential

Table 14-5 The Presidential Vote's Effect on Presidential Year Change in Democratic House Seats, 1900-1988

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variable: Change in the Democratic Congressional Seats from the Prior Midterm to the Presidential Election</i>			
	<i>All Presidential Elections Included</i>		<i>Third-Party Elections Excluded</i>	
	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>
Democratic presidential vote	3.16 (4.71)	3.18 (4.98)	3.43 (4.01)	3.30 (3.81)
New Deal	—	61.73 (2.62)	—	60.97 (2.28)
Prior Democratic House seats	—	-.24 (1.74)	—	-.22 (1.36)
Constant	-152.82	-98.23	-164.81	-109.10
Number of cases	23	23	19	19
R^2	.51	.72	.49	.69
Adjusted R^2	.49	.67	.46	.63
Standard error	26.38	21.13	28.20	23.22
Mean absolute error	19.51	14.71	21.04	16.22

Note: t-ratios are in parentheses. The Democratic presidential vote is the Democratic share of the two-party vote. The number of seats has adjusted to a constant House size of 435 seats. Seats held by third parties have been divided equally between the two major parties for comparability across years. The New Deal variable is a dummy taking on a value of 1 for 1932 and zero otherwise. Significant third-party elections excluded from regressions 3 and 4 are 1912, 1924, 1968, and 1980. The number of prior Democratic seats are from the previous midterm election.

and midterm elections. These are (1) the first eight pairs of presidential and midterm elections in this century up to the New Deal realignment (1900-30), (2) the seven pairs of elections following the New Deal realignment (1936-62) and (3) the most recent seven pairs of elections (1964-90). These regressions will help us determine how surge and decline effects may have changed over time.

Table 14-6 presents the midterm decline equations for the three subsets of elections. As in the first general equations of Tables 14-1 and 14-2, the prior Democratic presidential vote is used to explain midterm congressional vote and seat change. There are three important findings: (1) The most notable finding is that the prior presidential vote has the expected significant negative effects in each series. In each series, including the most recent, the prior presidential vote coefficient is at least three times its standard error. (2) While significant and strong in each era, midterm decline effects are somewhat smaller in recent years

Table 14-6 Trend in the Presidential Vote's Effect on Midterm Change in Democratic House Votes and Seats, 1902-1990

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variables: Change in the Democratic Congressional Votes or Seats from the Presidential to the Midterm Election</i>					
	<i>1902-1930</i>		<i>1938-1962</i>		<i>1966-1990</i>	
	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Seats</i>
Prior Democratic presidential vote	-.39 (3.20)	-3.77 (3.20)	-.67 (6.73)	-6.25 (7.99)	-.50 (3.85)	-3.59 (4.62)
Constant	18.48	189.82	31.80	301.67	24.63	175.18
Number of cases	8	8	7	7	7	7
R^2	.63	.63	.90	.93	.75	.81
Adjusted R^2	.57	.57	.88	.91	.70	.77
Standard error	3.09	29.91	1.64	12.94	2.42	14.53
Mean absolute error	1.96	20.55	1.14	9.16	1.75	10.20

than they were in mid-century. They declined by 25 percent in the case of vote change and 43 percent in the case of seat change. (3) Although midterm decline effects are weaker now than they were from the late thirties through the early sixties, they are not appreciably weaker than they were in the elections earlier in this century. Midterm effects on seat changes were slightly stronger in the earlier period but midterm effects on vote changes were actually weaker in early elections. While recent midterm decline effects may compare favorably with effects early in the century because of complications from third-party elections, the comparison suggests that, though diminished, midterm decline effects remain potent by historical standards.

The analysis of surge effects in presidential election years in the three subsets of elections generally reinforces the above findings. These regressions are presented in Table 14-7. Like midterm decline effects, presidential surge effects are significant and positive in all three eras, including the most recent elections. Also, as in the case of the midterm decline, presidential surge effects, though significant, are generally somewhat weaker now than in the past (see also Campbell, 1991, 1992). There is very little difference in the effects of the presidential surge on vote change, but its effects on seat change were just more than half its previous magnitude.

The apparent weakening of surge and decline effects may reflect, in part, trends in voting behavior. Partisan dealignment may have weakened coattails (accounting for the drop in the presidential vote coefficients) and increased incumbency advantages may account for the reduced vote and seat changes (accounting for the increased effects of the initial vote and seat holdings). It is also

Table 14-7 Trend in the Presidential Vote's Effect on Presidential Year Change in Democratic House Votes and Seats, 1900-1988

Independent variables	<i>Dependent Variable: Change in the Democratic Congressional Vote or Seats from the Prior Midterm to the Presidential Election</i>					
	1900-1928		1936-1960		1964-1988	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
Democratic presidential vote	.55 (5.69)	3.48 (2.58)	.31 (4.00)	4.19 (3.15)	.29 (3.61)	2.34 (3.21)
Prior Democratic congressional vote or seats	-.83 (2.84)	-.32 (.58)	-.67 (5.23)	-.72 (3.60)	-.31 (1.20)	-.39 (1.05)
Constant	13.06	-108.02	20.47	-26.12	2.41	-11.52
Number of Cases	8	8	7	7	7	7
R^2	.87	.72	.90	.79	.81	.74
Adjusted R^2	.82	.60	.85	.68	.72	.61
Standard error	1.92	20.61	1.26	18.31	1.44	13.59
Mean absolute error	1.09	14.09	.83	12.75	.92	9.07

likely that some portion of this apparent weakening of presidential coattails may be unrelated to voting behavior. Presidential coattails in several recent elections have been "wasted" by the absence of congressional candidates to ride them. In elections since the late 1960s, favorable Republican short-term forces in many southern congressional districts have not helped Republican congressional candidates because there were no Republican candidates in these districts, Democratic congressional candidates ran unchallenged (Campbell, 1992, 1993).

While there is no doubt that surge and decline effects are weaker than they once were, one point should be emphasized: *presidential surge and decline effects on congressional elections remain substantial*. Even in recent years, a party's success in presidential elections helps it win more congressional votes and seats. As in the past, these are short-lived gains. As in the past, a party should reasonably expect to lose congressional votes and seats in proportion to how well its presidential candidate performed in the previous election. There is a presidential pulse to congressional elections.

NOTES

1. This abstention effect of cross-pressures has been well documented. It was observed in the earliest voting studies (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944, p. 64) and is also

evidenced in more recent work, including Zipp (1985), Brown (1991, p. 153), and Campbell (1987).

2. Note that the original and revised theories of surge and decline lead to identical hypotheses regarding national aggregate congressional vote and seat change, though the revised theory explicitly acknowledges an additional referenda component to midterm change. The differences between the original and revised theories emerge most clearly at the micro-level (see Campbell, 1993, chap. 8; 1987).
3. A parallel analysis with dependent and independent variables oriented in terms of the presidential party rather than the Democratic party was also conducted. The analysis generally supports the main analysis reported below, though the results were somewhat weaker because orienting variables in terms of the presidential party restricts or truncates variance in both dependent and independent variables. When oriented in terms of the presidential party, the lower bound of the prior presidential vote is 50 percent and, with very rare exceptions, vote and seat changes are losses.
4. Because the dependent variable is a change variable, consideration of change in the normal vote only makes a significant difference to estimates when the normal vote change is substantial and abrupt. When change is more gradual, any change in a party's base vote within the two-year interval should be fairly small and should not obscure the surge and decline effects.
5. There is a definite pattern of narrowing variance in both midterm vote and seat changes since 1900. If the narrowing variance pattern were severe enough through the century to cause distortions in the estimates, we would expect the equations to significantly underestimate early presidential party midterm losses and overestimate later losses. However, neither the vote loss nor seat loss residuals displayed trends of this sort.
6. Negative autocorrelation indicates non-random errors that tend to alternate in sign (for example, positive errors following negative errors). This may inflate standard errors thus biasing significance testing against inferring statistically significant coefficients.
7. These estimates are a good bit smaller than those in Tables 14-1 and 14-2. While one might suspect this reduction is a result of including the midterm popularity consideration into the multivariate analysis, this is not the case. A president's vote and later popularity during this period have been remarkably unrelated ($r = .001$). The difference is due to some decline in effects in recent years but mostly to the attenuation caused by orienting variables in terms of the winning and losing presidential parties rather than the Democratic and Republican parties (see Campbell, 1991).
8. Given the lack of significant direct economic effects in Table 14-3, the prior literature in support of this finding, and the small number of cases considered in this portion of the analysis, the equation was reestimated after dropping the economy variable. The parameters of the reestimated equation did not differ appreciably from the equation that included economic conditions.
9. Initial vote and seat holdings were not included in the midterm analysis because presidential coattails had already built in "slack" for midterm vote and seat change. Also, initial seat and vote holdings going into midterms are themselves partially a result of presidential coattails, proportionate to the presidential vote (which is included in the equation). In any case, adding the initial vote in seat holdings in the midterm analysis to equation 2 in Tables 14-1 and 14-2 does not yield significant effects. In the seat change equation, the initial seat holdings have the expected negative effects but do not reach statistical significance ($b = -.21$, $t = 1.41$). The initial vote share, the Democratic congressional vote percentage in the presidential election year, does not have the expected negative effect ($b = .03$, $t = .20$).