The Forum

Forecasting the 2006 National Elections to the U.S. House of Representatives

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Abstract

Drawing on several theories of congressional election change, this article presents a forecasting equation for seat change in U.S. House elections. The equation addresses the problem of the over time comparability of seat change when levels of competition at the congressional district level have declined dramatically, a decline that has substantially reduced the magnitude of net partisan seat change in recent decades. The equation is estimated using both on-year and midterm elections since 1944. It indicates that the 2006 midterm will likely be a good year for the Democrats. However, because of reduced levels of competition restricting the number of seats that are effectively "in play," Democratic Party gains are likely to be in the teens. Though Republicans may narrowly retain their control of the House, there is a very real possibility that Democrats will end the six election string of Republican House majorities.

KEYWORDS: congressional elections, political parties

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On November 7, 2006, probably somewhere on the order of 83 to 89 million Americans, between 40 and 43 percent of eligible voters, will decide who they will send to the 110th Congress to represent them in the U.S. House of Representatives. Currently, Republicans hold 231 seats, Democrats occupy 201, and there is one independent. There are currently two vacancies. One previously held by a Democrat and one by a Republican. If both parties hold their vacant seats, this effectively means that Democrats need a net gain of 15 seats to retake the control of the House that they lost six elections ago in 1994.[1]

Every American national election is important, but as nationally competitive as American politics is today, as severely polarized as it has become in recent years, and as troubled as the international situation is from Iraq to North Korea, the 2006 midterm election may have tremendous consequences for the conduct of American politics for years to come as well as for a range of policies directly affecting the lives, welfare, and security of millions of people.

We will not know the outcome of the election until November 7th, at the earliest, but we can attempt to size up what the likely outcome will be. How many seats are likely to shift between the Democrats and the Republicans? Will the iron law of midterm losses for the president's party hold or has it been permanently repealed? The president's party lost seats in the U.S. House as the result of 31 of 32 midterm elections between 1868 and 1994. However, the 1998 and 2002 midterm elections violated this regularity. During President Bill Clinton's second term, Democrats gained four seats in the 1998 midterm election. Republicans in the first midterm of President George W. Bush's presidency gained three seats in 2002. Both Presidents Clinton and Bush were unusually popular at the time of these midterms. Each enjoyed approval ratings at their midterms in the mid 60 percent range. Will the 2006 midterm elections return to the regular cycle of midterm presidential party losses and, if so, will these losses be large enough to shift control of the House from the Republicans to the Democrats?

Leading into this year's fall campaigns, a number of political observers have written epitaphs to the Republican House majority. Recently, the highly regarded and politically savvy commentator Charlie Cook of the National Journal wrote that Republicans would lose the House "unless something dramatic happens before Election Day."[2] His political weather forecast was for a "Category 4 or 5 hurricane," a tidal wave election. Cook highlighted the similarity of President Bush's presidential approval ratings to those of President Clinton prior to the 1994 midterm in which Democrats lost more than 50 seats and their House majority. Is 2006 shaping up as a repeat of 1994, only with Republicans taking the brunt of what Cook called a political tidal wave?

Some Complications to Forecasting U.S. House Elections

Election forecasting is always a difficult and an imperfect enterprise. Forecasters are at the mercy of their data, which is both limited in availability over time and imperfectly measured, and voters, candidates, and conditions can all change in unanticipated and perhaps unanticipatable ways between the time of the forecast and Election Day. Even with an unattainable perfect model and well behaved voters and candidates, and stable national political conditions, there are always local conditions that shift a few districts one way or the other. Added to these normal constraints on the accuracy of forecasts are several peculiar to congressional election forecasting. These need to be addressed to construct a strong forecasting model. Before describing the specifications of the forecasting model, it is worth reviewing three of these complications–complications in competition, the 1974 Nixon resignation midterm election, and the 1994 congressional realignment election.[3]

The first and most substantial problem facing congressional election forecasters is the huge change that has occurred in the competitiveness of House elections. It is a simple fact of arithmetic that a district's seat can only change party representation if it is contested. You can't beat somebody with nobody. The same limits on political change exist if a seat is only nominally or not seriously contested. Essentially, you can't beat somebody with a virtual nobody. Though there have always been virtual nobody congressional candidates, their numbers have increased dramatically in recent years. As David Mayhew put it some time ago, the marginals are vanishing.[4] There have been fewer and fewer seriously contested House elections. In elections between 1900 and 1968, typically about 107 districts were marginal (a vote division of 55 to 45 percent or closer). In elections between 1970 and 1992, this number dropped to about 65 districts. Since 1994, it has dropped further to fewer than 49 districts. In the 2004 election, only 27 districts (about 6 percent of all districts) were marginal.

Logically, fewer districts "in play" should mean both smaller gross and net seat swings between the parties. Having fewer seriously contested seats is functionally equivalent to having fewer seats, period. In fact, with the decline in the number of competitive seats, there has been a commensurate decline in the magnitude of partisan seat change. In elections between 1900 and 1968, the median seat change was 28 or 29 seats. With the declining number of marginal seats in elections from 1970 to 1992, the median seat change dropped to 12 seats. Since 1994, the median seat change dropped to a mere four seats. Setting aside the 1994 Republican breakthrough election, neither party has gained or lost more than ten seats in any election, on-year or midterm, since 1984. That is, again excluding the 1994 outlier, in nine national elections over the last two decades party seat gains and losses have been kept in single digits. For congressional elections, the

current political era is analogous to baseball's "deadball era" when scoring was low and home runs were a rare occurrence.

For forecasting models based on historical data the decline in seat change presents a problem. Under identical political circumstances, you cannot expect the same magnitude of seat gains or losses that you once could. Circumstances that might have produced a tidal wave change of fifty seats in the old days would now generate only a small fraction of that. What a big change meant in the 1950s is not what a big change means in 2006.

A second congressional election forecasting problem is what to do with the 1974 midterm election. On August 8, 1974, at the outset of the 1974 midterm campaigns and around the time that forecasts for that year would be assembled, Richard Nixon resigned his presidency as a result of the Watergate scandal. He was succeeded by then Vice President Gerald Ford. The complication that this raises for forecasts is whether presidential approval data for a resigned president is meaningful, comparable, and useful for forecasting purposes. The question for forecasters is how do you treat the special circumstances of 1974?

A third complication arises in how to treat the 1994 congressional election. The 1994 midterm election is quite clearly part of the late-twentieth century partisan realignment toward the Republicans and a more competitive national party system.[5] Republicans gained ground on the Democrats in presidential voting in the late 1960s and in party identification in the mid-1980s. Because of the time necessary to build a viable Republican Party in the South, congressional Republican in-roads there were largely delayed until the 1994 midterm elections. This raises complications for congressional forecasting because the normal factors affecting seat changes in elections are not necessarily those that affect the more permanent shifts of a realignment. The question for forecasters is how do you treat the special circumstances of 1994 and perhaps the 1996 election?

The Seat Change Forecast Equation

To obtain some bearing on the likely outcome of the 2006 midterm election, I have specified a forecasting model drawn from theories of congressional elections and adapted to the mission of forecasting the election before the fact and addressing the three complications noted above. The core of the model is an explanatory model that I published over twenty years ago in testing Angus Campbell's theory of surge and decline and Edward Tufte's referenda theory of midterm elections.[6] This is not an untested model ginned up for the occasion.

The equation consists of five predictor variables, four of which come into play in producing a forecast for 2006. All of the variables in the model are oriented toward the Democratic Party. The core of the model is the surge and decline variable measuring the strength and direction of short-term political forces (e.g.,

issue and candidate evaluations) in the on-year (and their repercussion effects in the midterm). The surge and decline variable is the Democratic Party presidential candidate's share of the two-party national popular vote less 50 percent. This reflects the surge in on-year short-term political forces. The sign is reversed for the subsequent midterm election to reflect the repercussion or decline in these short-term political forces. This variable has a value of 1.24 for 2006 reflecting President Bush's two party popular vote in 2004 of 51.24.

The second variable in the model is the number of seats won by the Democrats in the preceding election. This reflects the simple arithmetic fact that a party cannot gain seats that it already holds. Since more seats should dampen gains, a negative coefficient is expected for this variable. For comparability across elections, seats not held by either major party are counted evenly between the parties. This variable has a value 202.5 for the Democrats in 2006.

The third predictor variable is a dummy variable for the 1994 and 1996 realignment elections. It is clear, at least in retrospect, that 1994 marked a substantial and permanent departure from the congressional elections that had preceded it. The Republicans had been unable to seriously contest Democrats for control of the U.S. House for decades. The Democrats had maintained a majority of House seats since 1954 and Republicans had not come within 26 seats of retaking the House since 1958. After forty years in the minority, Republicans won a majority of seats in 1994 and (proving that this was not just short-term change) have now won six consecutive majorities. The 1996 election is included in the variable since some of the shift may have also affected that election. Since the realignment shifted seats in the Republican direction, a negative coefficient is expected for this variable. However, this variable does not come into play in predicting the 2006 midterm. It is in the model only to control for the realignment effect in the mid 1990s.

The fourth variable is the in-party midterm penalty variable.[7] This reflects the possibility that some votes may seek to counter-balance the president's party. This has also been termed cognitive Madisonianism, an effort by voters to check the powers of the president or balance the political perspective of the president by electing more of the president's partisan adversaries. The variable is coded one when the Democrats are the in-party at the midterm and negative one when Republicans are the in-party at the midterm. Since the variable reflects a penalty that voters may exact on the in-party, a negative coefficient is expected. The variable has a value of negative one in 2006 since the Republicans are the in-party.

The final predictor variable is the president's approval rating in the midterm election year. This is measured as the percentage of all respondents in the Gallup Poll approving of the president's job performance. The approval rate is then oriented toward the Democratic Party by subtracting 50 from it when a Democrat

sits in The White House at the midterm and subtracting it from 50 for midterms with a Republican president. The variable is scored zero for on-years. In order to produce a forecast well in advance of the election, the forecasting model version of this equation uses the latest Gallup approval numbers available by mid July of the election year. Because Richard Nixon resigned in 1974 between the time of this poll and that election, the 1974 election is omitted in estimating the forecast equation. Since the variable has been oriented to the Democratic Party's advantage, a positive coefficient is expected. This variable's value in 2006 is 10, reflecting Bush's 40 percent approval in July.

The specification of the forecast model to this point has addressed two of the three complications raised above. It has not, however, addressed the complication of the decline of competition in congressional elections at the district level. Clearly, a seat loss in 2004 means a great deal more because of the small number of seats in play than a seat loss in 1964 when there were 122 marginal districts. Not to take this into account would be like comparing nominal dollar expenditures in 1920 with those today. A dollar then is not a dollar now and a seat gained then is not equivalent to a seat gained now. To solve this comparability problem, seat changes can be examined as a percentage of the marginal districts in the election. The principle is the same as converting currency to take inflation into account. When 100 seats were marginal a big net seat gain might be 50 seats. When 50 seats are marginal, a big seat gain might be proportionately 25 seats.

This specification works well for explaining seat changes over time, but presents another problem for forecasting. No one knows until after the election how many seats were marginal. So now there are two unknowns in the dependent variable: the net seat change and the number of marginal seats. In order to calculate the predicted seat change, the number of marginal districts needs to be pinned down. Lacking a model to perfectly predict the number of marginal seats, three different strategies to addressing this problem will be used. The first is to use the trend in marginal districts to make an estimate of the most likely number of marginal seats. The number of marginal seats in an election is positively correlated with the number of marginal seats in the immediately preceding election ($r = .66$) and in the election before that ($r = .62$). Taking the average of the number of marginal seats in the 2002 (40) and 2004 (27) elections, it would be a reasonable guess that the number of marginal seats in 2006 would be in the vicinity of about 34 districts. This is higher than the extremely low level of competitive districts in the 2004 election, but consistent with the long term decline in marginal seats. A second strategy is to estimate seat change adjusted for the number of marginal seats in the previous election rather than the current one. Using the lagged rather than current level of competitiveness should weaken the equation a bit, but it has the virtue of systematically taking the difference between the current and lagged levels of competition into account in the equation's

estimation. The third strategy is to bypass the marginality issue and adjust seat change by the typical amount observed in a series of past elections. In essence, seat changes are adjusted by an index of changeability as observed in the typical amount of seat change in recent years. In this particular case, seat change will be estimated as a percentage of the median absolute seat change in the previous eight elections.

Estimating the Model

Since the seat change equation must be estimated on a rather small set of elections because of data availability, there may be well founded concerns about the robustness of the findings. A slight change in specification or coding here or there and estimating the equation with or without an election may change a forecast appreciably. Because of this concern for the robustness of the forecast, the seat change equation is examined first as an explanatory model and then in its three forecasting versions (adjusting seat change for competitiveness, lagged competitiveness, and the changeability index). The forecasting versions of the equation use July presidential approval numbers. In each case, the forecasting equation is estimated on all national elections since 1944 and separately on midterm elections since 1946.

The first two equations in table 1 present the explanatory version of the model. All of the coefficients are in the expected direction and, except for the number of seats already held variable, all are statistically significant both in the estimation using all elections and in that limited to only midterm elections. The overall fit of the equations to the seat change variable is fairly strong, but there is clearly a good deal of room for unspecified and local forces to have an impact on net seat swings. To get a sense of the degree of fit, the median absolute in-sample error in the first equation was 6 seats (a mean absolute in-sample error of 8.1 seats). Absolute errors were less than 10 seats in 24 of the 31 elections and 20 of the most recent 22 elections. Out-of-sample errors and actual forecasting errors would be a bit larger.

This explanatory model can be adapted for use as a forecasting model if one is willing to make a couple of assumptions about the number of marginal seats in the upcoming election and President Bush's approval ratings. Assuming that the number of marginal seats in 2006 is about the mean number of marginal seats in 2002 and 2004 (34) and assuming that President Bush's approval rating in November holds steady with his rating in July (40), the first two equations in table 1 indicate that Democrats should expect to gain something on the order of 13 to 16 seats in the 2006 midterm election. Of course local factors could shift a number of seats one way or the other and the assumptions regarding public

Table 1. Explaining and Predicting National Seat Change for the Political Parties in U.S. House Elections, 1944-2004

Dependent Variable: Democratic Party Seat Change as a Percentage of Marginal Districts in the Election

Predictor Variables	November Equations		July Equations	
	All Elections	Midterms	All Elections	Midterms
Dem. Pres. Vote Margin × Pres or Midterm Election	2.69** (4.92)	2.93** (3.65)	2.59** (4.24)	3.03* (2.42)
Prior Dem. House Seats	−.32** (3.04)	−.09 (.64)	−.35** (3.15)	−.19 (1.04)
Realignment of 1994-96	−25.79* (2.26)	−27.51* (2.28)	−22.50* (1.81)	−20.49 (1.19)
Midterm Penalty for the Presidential Party	−12.97* (2.52)	−14.61* (2.66)	−15.22** (2.57)	−15.24* (1.89)
Midterm Presidential Approval, Party Oriented	1.54** (3.63)	1.64** (4.65)	1.29** (3.02)	1.27* (2.82)
Constant	79.07** (3.08)	22.26 (.67)	85.69** (3.13)	45.21 (1.00)
N	31	15	30	14
Adjusted R^2	.77	.90	.72	.80
Std. Error of the Estimate	14.72	11.12	15.74	15.40
Durbin Watson	1.58	1.98	2.01	1.78
Predicted Democratic Party Seat Change assuming 34 Marginal Seats	+16.0[a]	+13.4[a]	+15.9	+13.1

Note: t-scores are in parentheses. *p<.05, ** p<.01, one-tailed. [a] Assumes that President Bush's approval rating in early November is the same as it was in July. Because President Nixon resigned from office between the time of the July approval poll and the election in 1974, the 1974 election is excluded from the July models. Seat change data are calculated from the U.S. House of Representative's Office of the Clerk (2005). The district two-party vote percentages for determining the number of marginals through 2000 were calculated from data in *CQ's Guide to U.S. Elections* (Moore, Preimesberger, and Tarr 2001). Later data were obtained through Barone and Cohen (2003) and the CQ Voting and Elections Collection (2005). The Democratic presidential vote margin is the two-party popular vote minus 50 percent. The sign for the prior election's margin is reversed for midterm elections. The realignment 1994-96 variable is a dummy variable scored one for those two elections and otherwise zero. The midterm penalty for the presidential party variable is scored 1 when the Democrats are the in-party at the midterm and −1 when Republicans are the in-party at the midterm and zero in on-years. The midterm approval is calculated from Gallup data obtained through the Roper Center. The midterm approval rating is oriented toward the Democrats by subtracting 50 from the rating under a Democratic president and

the rating from 50 under a Republican president. It is zero in on-years. The approval ratings used in the first two equations are the last Gallup numbers available before the November election. The approval rating used in the third and fourth equations are the Gallup numbers in mid July. In 2006, President Bush's approval in mid July was 40 percent. This is an approval score of plus 10 for the Democrats.

approval for President Bush on the eve of the election as well as the number of competitive districts may not hold, but if they did hold steady and history runs true to form, the 2006 midterm could leave either the Democrats or the Republicans with a razor thin House majority.

The third and fourth equations in table 1 and the four equations in Table 2 present three forecast versions of the seat change equation. The first in each pair of equations is estimated on the full series of on-year and midterm elections since 1944 and the second is estimated using only midterm elections. The first pair of forecast equations (the third and fourth equations in table 1) are identical to the explanatory equations in table 1 except that they use mid July numbers for presidential midterm approval ratings instead of those available immediately before the election.

The first pair of equations in table 2 is estimated with seat change divided by the lagged number of competitive districts and the second pair is estimated with seat change divided by the median absolute seat change in the prior eight elections. There were no real surprises in these estimates. The coefficients were in the expected direction and statistically significant in the all elections estimates.

The 2006 forecasts from the eight versions of the seat change equation are quite consistent. The forecasts range from a Democratic Party seat gain of 10 to 16 seats. Forced to give a point forecast, Democrats should gain about 13 seats in 2006. With the normal range of errors in these forecasts (conservatively, an average error in recent decades of about six seats), the outcome of the 2006 midterm could easily range from a slightly diminished Republican Party majority to a narrow Democratic Party majority. The forecast numbers tilt slightly to Republicans barely holding their majority, but an equally thin Democratic majority is nearly as likely. It is much less likely for Republicans to maintain or augment their current majority or for Democrats to secure more than a razor thin majority. It is just about a toss-up as to which party will control the House after the 2006 midterm elections.

Table 2. Predicting Seat Change taking Lagged District Competition and
Prior Absolute Seat Change into Account (July Equations), 1944-2004

Dependent Variable: Democratic Party Seat Change as a Percentage of the:

Predictor Variables	Number of Marginal Districts in Previous Election		Median Abs. Seat Change in Previous Eight Elections	
	All Elections	Midterms	All Elections	Midterms
Dem. Pres. Vote Margin ×	2.65**	2.03	.12**	.13*
Pres or Midterm Election	(3.91)	(1.85)	(4.12)	(2.66)
Prior Dem. House Seats	−.34**	−.06	−.015**	−.006
	(2.76)	(.36)	(2.95)	(.84)
Realignment of 1994-96	−27.33*	−25.95	−1.89**	−2.94**
	(1.99)	(1.72)	(3.24)	(4.28)
Midterm Penalty for the	−13.96*	−20.32*	−.65*	−.58
Presidential Party	(2.13)	(2.88)	(2.34)	(1.82)
Midterm Presidential Approval,	1.30**	1.37**	.08**	.07**
Party Oriented (mid July)	(2.74)	(3.46)	(3.92)	(3.98)
Constant	86.69**	16.94	3.82**	1.54
	(2.85)	(.43)	(2.97)	(.85)
N	30	14	30	14
Adjusted R^2	.66	.83	.73	.88
Std. Error of the Estimate	17.47	13.49	.74	.61
Durbin Watson	2.18	2.05	1.69	2.11
Predicted Democratic Party Seat Change	+13.1	+11.3	+13.3	+10.2

Note: t-scores are in parentheses. *p<.05, ** p<.01, one-tailed. Because President Nixon resigned from office between the time of the July approval poll and the election in 1974, the 1974 election has been excluded. For sources, definitions, and codings of the variables see Table 1. The approval ratings used are the available Gallup poll numbers in mid July. In 2006, the Gallup approval rating for President Bush was 40 percent. Oriented toward the Democratic Party, this is an approval score of 10. The lagged number of marginal districts for 2006 is 27. The median absolute seat change for the previous eight elections in 2006 was 5.75 seats.

Perspective on the 2006 Midterm

The 2006 midterm election is shaping up as a good year for the Democrats and a bad year for Republicans. The iron law of presidential party midterm losses, violated in 1998 and 2002 with highly popular presidents at the time, will almost certainly be restored in 2006. In late summer polls asking the generic ballot question of "if the election for the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2006 were being held today, would you vote for the Democratic candidate or the Republican candidate in your congressional district?" Democrats outpolled Republicans by 10 to 18 percentage points. In an ABC News/Washington Post poll conducted in early August, 62 percent of respondents indicated that they disapproved of the way that President Bush has been handling the situation in Iraq. Only, 36 percent approved. The broader picture is not much better for the President, though his numbers were rising a bit toward the end of the summer. His approval ratings in mid July through early August in most polls stood at about 40 percent. Since 1944, nine presidents clearly stood higher in the polls at this point in their term and five were about equally down in the polls.[8]

Though there are plenty of signs that 2006 will be a good year for the Democrats, a good year is not what it once was. In the twentieth century through the election of 1970, a good election for a party placing it in the top quartile of seat change meant that the party would gain at least 48 seats. In elections since 1980, the top quartile of seat gains in an election is only 15 seats. This suggests that the comparisons of 2006 and 1994 may be a good bit overheated. The remarkable gains that Republicans made in 1994, when the staggered realignment finally deepened in congressional elections, is very unlikely to be replicated on the Democratic side in 2006. A strong showing by the Democrats is likely to gain them more than ten but probably less than twenty seats. This would, however, make 2006 only the second election in twenty years in which a party gained seats more than ten seats.

The forecast for Democratic Party seat gains in the teens is predicated on there being a relatively small number of seriously contested districts, as there have been in recent elections. In each of the last four national elections, 50 or fewer congressional contests could be classified as marginal or closely fought, with the winning candidate receiving 55 percent of the vote or less.

If the number of marginals increases to 50 this year, a realistic if not the most probable scenario according to trends in district competitiveness, Democrats could gain more than twenty seats.[9]

Whether the number of competitive seats remains in the mid twenties as it was in 2004 or returns to 50 as was in 1998, it will quite probably remain low by historical standards and this places a severe constraint on how many seats a party can gain in a good year. Several reasons have been suggested for why the

marginals have nearly vanished–from gerrymandering to campaign finance advantages for incumbents. Whatever the reason, there is no reason to think that these obstacles to competition and seat change are not in place for 2006. Moreover, the intense partisan polarization that has characterized American politics in recent years, if anything, should make change less likely. It is worth noting that the same ABC News/Washington Post poll in early August that indicated that those who disapproved of President Bush's handling of the war in Iraq outnumbered those who approved by 26 percentage points also asked which political party they trusted more to handle the situation and, on that comparative party question asked of the same respondents at the same time, Democrats held only a three point edge over Republicans.

Notes

1. As of August 12, 2006 according to
http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/vacancies.html. The two vacancies are Tom DeLay's seat 22nd district seat in Texas and Robert Menendez's 13th district seat in New Jersey.
Also, Bernard Sanders, the independent representing Vermont's at large seat, is leaving that seat for a Senate bid. Since my model, for comparability across years, counts independents as half of a seat to each major party, assuming they hold Menendez's seat, Democrats have effectively 202.5 seats and need a 15.5 seat gain to arrive at a 218 seat majority.

2. Charlie Cook, "Gathering Storm," Govexec.com, August 8, 2006.

3. A fourth complication was raised by Alan Abramowitz in his 2004 presidential forecast: how is presidential approval best measured? Traditionally, presidential approval has been treated simply as the percentage of all respondents in Gallup polls who indicate that they approve of the way a particular president has handled his job. Abramowitz noticed, however, that while most respondents either indicate approval or disapproval, a number indicate that they don't know and that this was a sizeable portion of the sample in early years and has become less so in recent times. In the 1940s and 1950s, on occasion more than 20 percent reported that they had no opinion about the president's job performance. It is now unusual to have more than five percent don't knows. The question for forecasting models is whether these don't knows should be effectively counted as disapproving of the president's job performance, as the traditional measure implicitly does, or should they be set aside and approval recalculated as the percent approving of those who had either explicitly approved or disapproved? After examining eight different estimations of the model, the traditional measure was found to yield stronger results in each instance. As a result, the analysis reported here uses only the traditional measure. Forecasts using the alternative measure produced forecasts that were only one or two seats different from the traditional measure.

4. David Mayhew, "Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals." *Polity* (Spring 1974) v.6, n.3: 295-317; Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections, Sixth Edition,* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004); James E. Campbell, "The Stagnation of Congressional Elections," In *Life After Reform: When the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act Meets Politics,* edited by Michael J. Malbin, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003):141-58.

5. Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders, "Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate." *The Journal of Politics* (August 1998) v.60, n.3: 634-52; James E. Campbell, "Party Systems and Realignments in the United States, 1868-2004," *Social Science History*, (Fall 2006) v.30, issue 3: 359-86 (forthcoming).

6. The first publication of the model was "Explaining Presidential Losses in Congressional Elections," *Journal of Politics* (November 1985) v.47, n.4: 1140-57. A more up to date and complete analysis of the model is in James E. Campbell, *The Presidential Pulse of Congressional Elections, Second Edition*. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997) and James E. Campbell, Chad Hankinson, and Walter Koch. "Re-evaluating the Theory of Surge and Decline: Seat Change Requires Competition," New England Political Science Association, Portland, ME, 2005. See also, Angus Campbell, "Surge and Decline: A Study of Electoral Change," *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 1960) v.24, n. 3: 397-418. Edward R. Tufte, 1975. "Determinants of the Outcomes of Midterm Congressional Elections," *American Political Science Review* (September 1975) v.69, n.3: 812-26.

7. Robert S. Erikson, "The Puzzle of Midterm Loss." *The Journal of Politics* (November 1988) v.50, n.4: 1011-29.

8. The five who were about equally down in their July polls were Truman in both 1946 (43 percent) and 1950 (46 percent), Carter in 1978 (40 percent), Reagan in 1982 (44 percent), and Clinton in 1994 (43 percent). Nixon, just weeks away from resigning in the Watergate scandal, had a mid July approval rating of just 24 percent.

9. If the number of marginal districts rose to 50 in 2006, expected Democratic Party seat gains would rise as well. Equations three and four in table 1 indicate Democratic Party seat gains of between 19 and 23 seats if there are 50 marginal districts.