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2006 MIDTERMS: POST-ELECTION APPRAISAL

Frustrated Ambitions: The George W. Bush Presidency and the 2006 Elections

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Frustrated Ambitions: The George W. Bush Presidency and the 2006 Elections*

Steven E. Schier

Abstract

The 2006 elections dealt a strong blow to the sizeable political and policy ambitions motivating the George W. Bush presidency. Bush's attempt to entrench a conservative political regime in national politics now faces its greatest peril. In particular, Bush's "political capital" is much reduced by Democratic control of the House and Senate. Bush's assertion of his formal powers will also receive greater challenge by Congress. It is now up to future GOP presidents to achieve Bush's extensive regime ambitions.

KEYWORDS: presidency, leadership, political parties

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The grand ambitions motivating the George W. Bush presidency – creating a GOP electoral majority, pursuing a more militarily assertive foreign policy and reconfiguring taxation and entitlement spending – aimed to create constructions of extensive consequence. The 2006 elections quashed administration hopes that these ambitions could be furthered during the remainder of his presidency.

Bush's big plans are best understood in terms of the power and authority a president seeks to exercise. *Power* involves the resources, formal or informal, that a president has in a given period to accomplish his goals. Success with power involves husbanding the resources of the office and deploying them strategically (Skowronek 1997, 18). Powers are both formal and informal. *Formal powers* are numerous and widely excised by recent presidents, growing from Constitutional authority, federal law and court interpretation. Bush will have to deploy these powers more defensively in upcoming fights with the Democratic Congress.

Bush's informal powers, however, are most diminished by the 2006 elections. *Informal power* is a function of the "political capital" presidents amass and deplete as they operate in office. Paul Light defines several components of *political capital*: party support of the president in Congress, public approval of the president's conduct of his job, the President's electoral margin and patronage appointments (Light 1983, 15). Richard Neustadt's concept of a president's "professional reputation" also figures into his political capital. Neustadt defines this as the "impressions in the Washington community about the skill and will with which he puts [his formal powers] to use" (Neustadt 1990, 185). In the wake of 9/11, George W. Bush's political capital surged and the public and Washington political elites granted him a broad power to prosecute a war on terror. By the middle of Bush's troubled second term, beset by a lengthy occupation of Iraq and a rash of Congressional GOP scandals, he found his political capital had shrunk. Bush's public approval, professional reputation and political support in Congress surged after 9/11, and then all three eroded in his troubled second term. After the 2006 elections, Bush's public approval and party support in Congress have again sunk, limiting further his leadership prospects for the remainder of his presidency (PollingReport 2006).

Regime Designs

In recent decades Washington power structures have become more entrenched and elaborate (Drucker 1995) while presidential powers – through increased use of executive orders and legislative delegation (Howell 2003) have also grown. The presidency has more powers in the early 21st century but also faced more entrenched coalitions of interests, lawmakers and bureaucrats whose agendas often differ from that of the president. This is an invitation for an energetic

president – and that description fits George W. Bush – to engage in major ongoing battles to impose his preferences.

At the center of the conflict lies the desire of presidents to create political “regimes” supported by popular approval and constitutional authority (Schier 2004, 3). A *regime* is a stable *authority structure* that reworks Washington power arrangements to facilitate its own dominance. Presidential power is intimately tied to presidential *authority*, defined as the “expectations that surround the exercise of power at a given moment; the perception of what it is appropriate for a given president to do” (Skowronek 1997, 18). Authority, to presidential scholar Stephen Skowronek, rests on the “warrants” drawn from the politics of the moment to justify action and secure the legitimacy of changes. The more stable a president's grant of authority, the easier his exercise of power.

George W. Bush's central project has been the promotion of a conservative Republican political regime. Politically, the administration sought persistent GOP electoral majorities through the tactic of ensuring high turnout among the party's base voters. This delivered a reelection victory for Bush in 2004. A second tactic of the Bush White House involved courting certain target groups in the electorate for conversion – in 2004, this included women, Latinos, African Americans and Jews. Central ideas of the regime included an emphasis upon employing market forces in public policy (from market-driven environmental protection policies to private Social Security accounts), economic stimulus through recurrent tax cuts, and an aggressive foreign and military policy driven by a doctrine of preemption of international terrorist threats. Institutionally, these policies would result from partisan GOP majorities in the House and Senate and enhanced presidential control over the executive branch, through expansive use of executive orders and reorganization, many spawned by national security concerns (Schier 2004, 3-4).

The 2006 election results preclude the fulfillment of the regime-level aspirations of the Bush presidency. Though the GOP base supported their candidates strongly in 2006, a mass exodus of independent voters, frustrated by Iraq and corruption, and a heavy turnout of motivated Democrats caused the GOP electoral coalition to shrivel (ABC News Polling Unit 2006). Republican support among at least one crucial target group plummeted; Latino support for the GOP dropped from 40-44 percent in 2004 to 30 percent in 2006 (Fears 2006). Private Social Security accounts, shunned by a skittish GOP-controlled Congress in 2005-6, seem farther than ever from passage. GOP recapture of Congress, particularly in the Senate where 31 of 34 seats up for election in 2008 are Republican-held, seems a difficult task at best. Bush's expansive formulation of executive powers will now spawn extensive and hostile Congressional investigations. National security concerns, once a “hole card” for the GOP in elections, have now turned into a negative for Republicans due to America's protracted and difficult military involvement in Iraq.

In broader perspective, what limits is George W. Bush now up against? One type involves the “*endogenous limits* that stem from the nature of the political agreement that binds participants” (Cook and Polsky 2005, 580). How well has his coalition stuck together? The George W. Bush presidency benefited from relatively few endogenous limits of this sort until its second term. But midway through this term, beset by an array of difficult events and policy controversies – the response to hurricane Katrina, the Iraq occupation and battles over immigration reform – Bush found his support among GOP lawmakers receding. And despite strong Republican support in the 2006 elections, his coalition proved a distinct minority of the electorate. In the 2006 House elections, the GOP polled only about 46 percent of the vote nationwide, by far the lowest percentage since the GOP took control of Congress in 1994 (Cost 2006).

Exogenous constraints, those arising from the political environment in which the regime operates, have proved much more restrictive throughout Bush’s presidency (Cook and Polsky 2005, 580-1). Bush encountered firm limits from these constraints as his presidency proceeded. The administration’s emphasis on the maintenance of its supporting coalition spawned partisan polarization in Congress and the electorate. This placed a low ceiling on Bush’s job approval after the halo effect of 9/11 dissipated. It provoked Democrats to employ institutional rules like the filibuster and federal court challenges to impede the administration’s agenda and spawned grassroots liberal organizations like MoveOn to engage in ongoing media campaigns against the administration. These opposition efforts will magnify in the new Democratic Congress.

The Trail of Events

At the heart of any presidency lie events and the political skills of the president and his administration. Presidents have discretion to create some events, but they also are subject to nondiscretionary events that just happen to them. Such events create positive and negative political impact for presidents. A careful look at the major events of the Bush presidency from this perspective reveals the rollercoaster ride of the George W. Bush’s time in office. Bush had two impressive years and then encountered big trouble, both self-created and from without.

By examining the chronicles of major events in three reputable reference sources – the World, Time magazine and New York Times Almanacs – one can identify major trends of the Bush presidency through 2005. Following Brace and Hinckley (1993), events involving Bush’s presidency were included if at least two almanacs mentioned them. The events received classification as discretionary – happenings the president helped to create, or nondiscretionary – news foisted on the president from without. This analysis also classified the events as politically

positive or negative for Bush in the short term. Multiple researchers checked the classifications, producing a reliable chronicle of Bush administration events and their political consequences.¹

The evidence reveals tremendous zigs and zags for this president. Despite a highly controversial election, the Bush administration got off to a very strong start, buoyed by savvy presidential actions and news from without that boosted the president. In 2001, the Bush administration produced twenty-six positive discretionary events and only one negative event – recall the tax cuts, major education reforms, an arms control deal with Russia and military success in Afghanistan. In addition, nondiscretionary events ranked three to one positive for the administration, most notably including the 9/11 catastrophe that produced an upsurge of public support for Bush. The Bush administration's roll continued at a slower clip in 2002, posting a 4.2 to 1 positive ratio in their discretionary actions despite bad news on the economy. By the end of 2002, though, the Bush administration had already racked up a majority of all its positive discretionary events.

The turning point in Bush's presidency was clearly the Iraq war. The successful invasion has been just about the last good international news that the Bush administration received. From 2003 through 2005, negative fallout from the war buffeted the administration – the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal in Iraq, the Valerie Plame CIA leak controversy, no WMD found in Iraq and no clear connection of Iraq with 9/11 revealed. In the event count, 2004 was clearly Bush's worst year, with half of all the major negative news events buffeting the administration occurring in that year. Twelve major news events from without were negative for the administration in that year, none positive. One of Bush's greatest political accomplishments was winning reelection in such an ominous situation.

The first half of 2005 produced a small recovery in positive discretionary events for the administration, but that was short lived. Overall, the administration compounded the bad news since 2002 with errors of their own – the poor response to hurricane Katrina, failure at Social Security reform, staff shakeups, the administration retreat from a Dubai firm's attempt to own American ports, the aborted Harriet Meiers Supreme Court nomination. That left the administration in a deep valley in 2006 from which they could not recover.

¹ Three researchers independently coded the event data, classifying events as discretionary and nondiscretionary and politically positive or negative in the short term. The Index of Agreement among the three coders was 95.7 percent. The few differences in coding regarding disputed cases were easily resolved in subsequent discussions among the coders. Thus the reliability of the analysis rivals that of Brace and Hinckley's event study of previous presidents (1993, Appendix A).

This event analysis suggests that the George W. Bush presidency turned on the Iraq war. Whether or not the U.S. involvement in Iraq ultimately yields success, the immediate political costs for Bush were heavy indeed, and the administration responded to this adverse environment with a series of costly political errors. The grand regime goals of the Bush administration – a political realignment and policy revolution benefiting conservative Republicans – were partially realized by 2002. After that, progress on those goals slowed considerably, undone by adverse events and the White House's unskillful response to the ensuing difficulties. The 2006 elections augur a countertrend that places all of Bush's early regime goals in great jeopardy.

Defining Success

Responding with skill to the challenges imposed by events is a concise definition of a successful presidency. A president's success or failure at this greatly determines his informal powers – his political capital – and thus his ability to employ formal powers effectively in practice. In this regard, the passage of time is usually not kind to presidents. As challenges arise and decisions are made, presidents make enemies and deplete their public popularity (Brace and Hinckley 1993, Light 1983). Second terms in particular usually feature lower presidential popularity and success at governance, and the George W. Bush presidency proved no exception to this (Brace and Hinckley 1993; Zacher 1996). National crises may punctuate these trends with “rally” effects that produce a surge of popular approval of a president, temporarily expanding his political capital (Brody 1991). The post-9/11 “rally” for George W. Bush is the most long-lived in presidential history (Hetherington and Nelson 2003).

Wars, however, create great changes in national politics and can deplete a president's political capital. Yale political scientist David Mayhew identified the two major effects of American wars on our national politics and public policy. First, wars produce “new issue regimes,” defined by Mayhew as “new long-lasting highly public controversies within specific issue areas” (Mayhew 2005, 475). Since Sept. 11, 2001, those issues have involved national security from terrorist attacks and a related debate on the future of civil liberties. Second, wars can also create new political alignments. Bush and the GOP exploited concerns about terrorism to maximum partisan advantage in 2002 and maintained an important edge with those issues in 2004. Historically, parties in charge of major wars suffered big electoral reversals after the conflict's conclusion (Mayhew 2005, 483). Larry Bartels and John Zaller also found that the drawn-out wars of Korea and Vietnam cost the party in charge a 4 percent loss at the polls in the 1952 and 1968 elections as the wars dragged on (Bartels and Zaller 2001). The

electoral costs of the Iraq war in 2006 place it firmly in the Korea/Vietnam category.

Two pitfalls obstructed Bush's large presidential ambitions. One grew from the small partisan majorities supporting Bush in Congress. Any slippage in his partisan support in either chamber risked stalemate (Hargrove and Nelson 1984, 214). GOP disunity on the administration's Social Security reform plans in 2005 produced exactly that outcome. A related pitfall concerned public opinion. The strongly partisan profile of the administration's agenda inhibited widespread public support for it as 9/11 faded from memory and the troublesome military occupation of Iraq produced an unhappy public mood (Jacobson 2006). Polls during his second term revealed little public enthusiasm for Bush's agenda (PollingReport.com 2005). Bush in his second term risked a situation similar to that befalling William Howard Taft, in which "the president's agenda bears little resemblance to what the public is willing to accept" (Hargrove and Nelson 1984, 68). His failure to sell his structural changes in Social Security placed him, on that issue, in Taft's situation. Bush's declining political capital in his second term first led to GOP fragmentation in Congress as lawmakers distanced themselves from an unpopular president, and then to the large GOP losses in the 2006 elections. The attempt by the Bush administration to operate a neo-parliamentary regime based on unified GOP support in Congress (Pomper 2003) facilitated a sweeping repudiation of the party in the 2006 elections. The GOP "brand" had been on bold public display for several years, making it an easy target for opponents as events turned sour.

Conclusion

The George W. Bush presidency has proven highly ambitious in its broader regime construction efforts and everyday governing style. At the systemic level, George W. Bush energetically used his formal and informal powers in an attempt to entrench a durable, conservative GOP regime, a stable authority structure that would persist for years to come. His ambitions were blunted through the exogenous limits imposed by partisan polarization spawned by his very regime construction efforts. As difficulties mounted in his second term, additional endogenous limits to Bush's ambitions appeared. Declining public approval of the Bush increased internal divisions within his governing party, reducing the stability and durability of his governing coalition. Public dissatisfaction with Congressional corruption and America's Iraq involvement then fractured the GOP regime via the Democratic triumph in the 2006 elections.

What is left to Bush in 2007-8? He must manage Iraq in a way to produce a more peaceful situation and smaller American military presence there. He can

work with Congressional Democrats in a few areas of common interest, such as immigration reform.

His ability to further a conservative regime in the courts is now largely ended, and his attempts to assert extensive executive powers will receive new political challenges from Congress. Ultimately, his regime ambitions are now reduced to conserving enough popularity to keep the GOP competitive in the 2008 presidential election. For it is up to future Republican presidents to fulfill Bush's extensive regime ambitions. The events of his second term, and his response to them, have ended those grand designs.

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Article 2

2006 MIDTERMS: POST-ELECTION APPRAISAL

The Midterm: What Political Science Should Ask Now

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The Midterm: What Political Science Should Ask Now*

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Abstract

The 2006 midterm has undercut some familiar assertions about contemporary electoral politics. Political analysts seem to have overstated Republican advantages in several areas: voter turnout, campaign finance, congressional apportionment, party unity, and social issues. The GOP's loss is the discipline's gain, as the election raises good questions for scholarly research.

KEYWORDS: elections, midterms, congress, political parties

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The 2006 midterm has undercut some familiar assertions about contemporary electoral politics. In doing so, it has raised good questions for scholarly research.

According to some accounts, Republicans had built an advantage so great that they could cling to power even if moderate voters turned against them. This “backlash insurance” purportedly put democracy itself at risk. Such fears proved farfetched.

Start by considering campaign technology, which was the subject of news articles (De Frank and Bazinet 2006) and popular books (Hamburger and Wallsten 2006). Using costly databases, Republicans amassed detailed statistics on millions of households. They targeted voter appeals with high precision, sending one kind of message to snowmobile owners, another to Krugerrand investors, and so on. GOP operatives claimed that this “microtargeting” had helped tip close states to President Bush in 2004. Some observers thought that it would perform similar magic for congressional Republicans in 2006. They forgot two things.

First, Democratic party organizations and their allies were spending millions on their own databases. “We’ve caught up to, if not passed [the Republicans] on the technological level,” said the head of one microtargeting firm that works with Democrats (Hoover 2006).

Second, there were questions as to whether microtargeting lived up to its billing. In a post-election article, a Republican consultant said that microtargeting can work under the right circumstances. But in an unfavorable setting – such as Republicans faced in 2006 – the data become unreliable. He worried that GOP efforts may have backfired by inadvertently turning out Democratic voters (Stutts 2006).

Donald Green, a leading academic expert on voter turnout operations, questioned media stories of how buying habits betoken political views. “Consumer preferences do not predict a large degree of variance in voting preference beyond what is predicted by party registration, voting in party primaries, and other more directly political predictors.” He stressed that “there is no reliable scientific evidence – that is, evidence based on randomized experiments – showing that microtargeting is worth the cost” (Green 2006). Anecdotes about Democratic success and Republican frustration may now prompt scholars or political professionals to carry out these experiments.

Another much-hyped GOP advantage lay in campaign finance. Total spending by GOP party committees did top that of Democratic committees – but by a smaller margin than in the past. And the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) actually outspent the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC). Democrats also enjoyed the help of labor unions and other groups outside the formal party organization (Greenhouse 2006).

Republican incumbents tended to have more money than Democratic challengers. As scholars of campaign spending have long known, challengers need not match incumbents in fundraising, as long as they gather enough money to reach the voters. In early August, it was clear that many Democratic challengers had already reached that point. The Democrats' moneyball gained momentum as corporate political action committees courted the favor of the likely new majority. Charles Rangel (D-New York) joked to the *Los Angeles Times*: "I don't think meeting with the chairman of General Electric has anything to do with my taking over Ways and Means; I just never realized how much they loved me" (Simon 2006).

Researchers should ask how Democrats narrowed the fundraising gap, with special attention to the congressional campaign committees. In particular, NRSC chair Elizabeth Dole (R-North Carolina) seemed out of her league next to DSCC chair Charles Schumer (D-New York). Did this weakness help cost Republicans control of the Senate?

The Democratic takeover of the upper chamber appears all the more remarkable in light of claims about its pro-GOP bias. Republicans do better in smaller, rural states, and each state gets two senators regardless of population. Therefore, the GOP might seem to have a permanent structural edge in Senate elections. History undermines this notion. Since direct elections for the Senate started in 1914, the same party has controlled both chambers nearly ninety percent of the time. A striking and under-appreciated pattern keeps the House and Senate moving in tandem. Senate races are more competitive than House races, so even though only one-third of Senate seats are up in any election, a national tide will shift a greater share of those seats (Martinson 2004). So just as 1994 swept in Republican majorities on both sides, 2006 swept them out.

On the House side, gerrymandering was an ostensible barrier to a Democratic takeover. The redistricting after the 2000 census did protect House incumbents, making it harder for the minority party to score gains. Nevertheless, some commentators overstated the effect of computer-crafted districts. No matter how technologically sharp a redistricting scheme may be, demographic and political changes start to blunt its impact as soon as the map comes out of the printer. Young people and new citizens enter the electorate. Old voters die. Americans of all ages move around. Economic and social upheavals lead people to switch their party preference. Such shifts were on stark display in New York State, where a bipartisan gerrymander had once seemed to guarantee the GOP a certain minimum of House seats. Between 2002 and 2006, the Republican registration advantage outside New York City shrank from 160,000 to less than 3,000 (Roberts 2006). This trend helped nudge three GOP seats into the Democratic column.

Texas, Florida, and Pennsylvania had notorious Republican gerrymanders that boomeranged. The *Wall Street Journal* reported shortly after the election: “Republican leaders may have overreached and created so many Republican-leaning districts that they spread their core supporters too thinly. That left their incumbents vulnerable to the type of backlash from traditionally Republican-leaning independent voters that unfolded this week” (Cummings 2006).

District lines surely saved a number of GOP seats that would otherwise have gone under, but it seems likely that the Republican redistricting advantage had ebbed. If enterprising graduate students get the necessary data, they can write fine dissertations gauging the breadth of this change.

Those who worried about GOP dominance asserted that the party had a unified national machine that could crush the disorganized Democrats. Think tanks, interest groups, magazines, blogs, and radio programs all supposedly worked with party organizations to maintain Republican power. Such claims had always been overblown, and in 2006, they were almost risible. Far from serving as instruments of Republican power, conservative organizations and activists held a lively discussion over whether victory was even desirable (Antle 2006). Wrote *National Review* senior editor Ramesh Ponnuru:

The Congressional wing of the party lost its reformist zeal years ago and has been trying to win elections based on pork and incumbency. An election victory would reward that strategy, leaving the congressmen even less interested in restraining spending, reforming government programs and revamping the tax code. Political incompetence and complacency, sporadic corruption and widespread cynicism: having paid a price for none of it, Republicans would indulge in more of the same. (Ponnuru 2006).

He concluded that a loss of power “would make the Republicans hungrier and sharpen their wits.” Former Delaware Governor Pete du Pont, who sought the 1988 GOP presidential nomination and now heads a conservative think tank, said of congressional Republicans: “They haven't done anything on health care. And they have raised federal spending by \$750 billion since 2001 and for fiscal 2006 approved 10,000 earmarks costing \$29 billion. Conservative principles seem to have faded away, and ethical principles have weakened – names like DeLay, Ney, and Foley make the point” (du Pont 2006). He was actually arguing *for* a GOP victory: though Republicans deserved to lose, he said, Democrats were worse. Not exactly the St. Crispin's Day Speech.

The conservative Club for Growth spent heavily to beat liberal Senator Lincoln Chafee in the Rhode Island Republican primary, forcing the National Republican Senatorial Committee to spend heavily in his support. A weakened Chafee won the primary, and then lost the general election. This internal warfare burned resources that would have helped other Republicans.

Contrary to myth, Republicans on Capitol Hill were not more unified than their foes. For decades, both parties in both chambers had attained comparable levels of cohesion on roll call votes. In the 2005 *CQ* party unity scores, for instance, House Republicans stood only two points ahead of the Democrats, and the Senate parties were tied at 88 percent each (Kady 2006). During the 109th Congress, in fact, the parties seemed to swap their stereotypical roles. Democrats united against President Bush's Social Security proposal, while the GOP quit the fight. Republicans bickered over earmarks and ethics reform, and many moved away from their previous support of the administration's policy on Iraq.

The party split over immigration, with House members favoring a tough enforcement approach and senators backing a more lenient policy. While some Republicans seemed to gain traction with a hard-line message, Hispanic support for GOP House candidates fell at least 10 points from 2004. The GOP dropped at least one seat over the issue. In the race to succeed Jim Kolbe (R-Arizona), the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) backed a moderate candidate, who lost the primary to Randy Graf, a member of the Minutemen. As NRCC had feared, Graf's stance put off independents and Democrats, and he went down to a double-digit defeat in November.

To gain a full understanding of national party politics, scholars must grasp the divisions among conservatives and Republicans. This topic needs much more attention in the literature.

Yet another assumption that has outlived its validity is the notion that Republicans win with "hot-button social issues." Immigration is not that only hot button that went cold or unpressed in 2006. There was little talk about gay marriage in the campaign, and for a simple reason: most states had already limited marriage to the union of a man and a woman (National Conference of State Legislatures 2006). Constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage were on the 2006 ballot in eight states, but all eight had previously enacted statutory bans. Voters approved seven of these measures, without any great sense of urgency. Late in the season, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples should enjoy the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. Though some Republicans tried to rally the base, the decision was too late and too ambiguous to make much of a mark.

Few scholars have noticed that Republican candidates seldom oppose affirmative action anymore. A measure on the 2006 Michigan ballot proposed to end racial and gender preferences in state employment and contracting, as well as public education. The GOP nominees for governor and senator both came out against it. The measure passed by a wide margin, in spite of the hostility of the state's political establishment and an intense campaign against it. This outcome in a "blue" state suggests that affirmative action could still be a potent political issue. Scholars should ask why Republicans have backed away from it.

More generally, political scientists should give a more careful look to the GOP. With certain exceptions (e.g., Taylor 2005), they have not done the kind of careful, interview-based research that the subject deserves. The 2006 election suggests that there is much more to learn.

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Wall vs. Wave?

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Abstract

How did a wave of anti-Republican sentiment breach the wall of structural advantages available to the majority party? In 2006, as in 1994, we learned that structural advantages are not impregnable, there is no permanent minority, and all politics is local, except when it is national. Like House Democrats in 1994, House Republicans in 2006 could not govern the country, could not govern Congress, and could not govern themselves. In particular, in both elections the majority parties beat themselves due to their failure to control the mischiefs of faction within their own ranks. In managing such factions, each party faces a constitutional quandary: government or opposition, compromise or confrontation, policy or politics.

KEYWORDS: 2006 elections, Congress, midterms

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To understand why Republicans took a “thumping” in 2006 elections, we must start with election fundamentals. Begin at the beginning with James Madison’s Constitution. The constitutional playing field presented Republicans in 2006 with the oft-dreaded six year itch election. Every two-term president since Teddy Roosevelt has suffered losses in his second midterm election.¹ When analysts predicted President Bush would be a drag on Republican candidates, they were, in part, acknowledging the *deus ex machina* of six year itch elections.² Coupled with the Iraq War, Bush’s second midterm election was virtually fated to harm Republicans. Every president at war since Abraham Lincoln has suffered midterm election losses. The six year itch and war explain much about the 2006 Republican rout.

The economy, another election fundamental commonly cited by observers, seemed not to play a large role in this election; unless, of course, a sound economy provided a back stop to Republican fortunes. Democrats briefly flirted with talk of high gas prices and a housing slump, but neither seemed to capture the public’s imagination, especially once gas prices plunged. Perhaps the economy mattered little because a more fundamental self-preservation issue – war – mattered a lot.

Democrats also sought throughout 2006 to make the “culture of corruption” charge stick to majority Republicans. The minority party had little success with corruption as an issue – in part because they too were implicated – until the Foley page scandal gift-wrapped the issue for Democrats. Election watcher Charlie Cook noted that Foley “took all the previous scandals that were totally unrelated obviously and then kind of put them in a box and put a big bow on it, and made them all sort of bigger than they had been before.”³ The charge of corruption, of course, is an accusation perennially available to either party in a Madisonian pluralist system premised on the unleashing of ambition, self-interest, and special interest groups. This year it had a name: earmarks. Typically, Americans seem to have a high level of patience with Members of Congress doing favors for constituents and advancing their own re-election with pork; yet, from time to time, our suspicions about a special interest dominated politics reaches a critical mass. November 2006 may be one such instance when Woodrow Wilson’s oft-echoed call for reform of Madisonian pluralism came home to roost.

¹ President Clinton, in effect, suffered his six year election four years early in 1994 thanks to a shaky start to his Administration.

² For a contrary view of the six year itch phenomenon, see Stuart Rothenberg, “Midterms Spell Trouble, But “Itch” Theory Is A Real Head Scratcher,” *Roll Call*, September 15, 2005. What Rothenberg calls “inevitable souring,” however, does seem to occur, though perhaps in all midterms, not just six year itch elections as he notes. Bill Clinton’s losses in 1994 minimized his party’s potential losses in 1998. Something similar might be said about Ronald Reagan and the 1982/1986 cycles.

³ C-span, “AARP Panel on 2006 Midterm Election,” November 8, 2006.

As important as the six year itch, Iraq, the economy and corruption are as explanations, they still leave many questions unanswered. If such factors in fact created a *wave* of anti-Republican sentiment, how did it manage to breach the *wall* of structural advantages available to the incumbent majority party? How did the normally all-politics-is-local tenor of Madisonian congressional elections, suddenly give way to a clearly nationalized election wave?

Analysts of congressional election commonly focus on certain additional fundamentals, including *reapportionment*, *redistricting*, *retirement* and *recruitment*. Along with *fundraising*, these factors influence candidate quality for the majority and minority, for incumbents and challengers alike.

Reapportionment and Redistricting

Constitutionally stipulated reapportionment has in recent decades shifted House seats into increasingly Republican-friendly parts of the country such as the Sunbelt, giving rise to GOP hopes of creating a “permanent majority” for House Republicans. GOP controlled state legislatures have in turn (as have Democrats when they have had the chance) drawn redistricting lines amenable to party pick ups. The Texas gerrymander is one infamous example. Why then did the Republican redistricting brick-in-the-wall not save them from the 2006 wave? In part it may in fact have saved them from a worse fate. Observers noted this year that upwards of fifty to sixty House seats were in play, a clear increase over recent years; and yet, most House seats remained safe incumbent redoubts, thus almost certainly muting eventual turnover numbers. Redistricting remains an increasingly computer-driven science, rather than the art it once was. Still, the 2006 elections proved that redistricting lines can get old; indeed, the shifting issue environment can render gerrymandered lines old before their time. Case in point: Iraq.

Retirement and Recruitment

In August 2006, *Congressional Quarterly* contrasted the 1994 Republican retirement and recruitment advantages with the more modest success of the 2006 Democrats: “Unlike the 1994 Democrats, the 2006 Republicans haven’t seen a major incumbent exodus leaving a long list of vulnerable open seats” and the 2006 Democrats “haven’t ... matched the Republican recruiting success of 1994.”⁴ Perhaps this explains in part why Democrats did not pick up the 52 seats the Gingrich-led Republicans did in 1994. Certainly during the fall, NRCC Chair Tom Reynolds did not miss an opportunity to tout the retirement and recruitment bricks in the GOP defensive perimeter. And yet immediately following the

⁴ Bob Benenson, “Blue State Special,” *CQ Weekly Report*, August 14, 2006, 2227.

November 7th election, *Congressional Quarterly* noted a weakness in Republican recruiting: “In contrast [to the Democrats], the Republicans failed to recruit strong challengers to many House Democrats. Just five districts now held by Democrats were considered to be highly competitive.”⁵

In other words, Republicans were playing defense in terms of retirement and recruitment. Why? The predictable six year itch, coupled with the unpopularity of President Bush and the Iraq War, gave potential Republican candidates fair warning about the probable 2006 electoral environment. The limits of GOP success managing the challenges of candidate quality must be understood in the context of the six year constitutional cycle coupled with war. The Constitution defines an institutional context that clearly influences retirement and recruitment decisions.

Fundraising and GOTV

The shrinking of any Republican fundraising advantage in 2006 must also be understood in the same context. Political scientists such as Gary Jacobson sometimes measure candidate quality in terms of the capacity to raise money, though constitutional context almost certainly influences fundraising success just as it does candidate retirement and recruitment decisions. In the months leading up to the election, the Republican PAC edge was eroding as K Street reevaluated the partisan odds. The Campaign Finance Institute noted that Democrats were financially more competitive in 2006 than in recent years. Democratic challengers sometimes outspent Republican incumbents, plus many more Democratic challengers had the requisite “enough” to be competitive against GOP incumbents.

A final structural advantage Republicans purportedly had was their vaunted Voter Vault and micro-targeting get-out-the-vote effort. Karl Rove and Ken Mehlman placed great stock in the GOTV edge that Republicans had manifest in previous elections; indeed, in the days immediately preceding the election the jaunty self-confidence exhibited by both seemed in large part premised on their faith in GOP GOTV. Was that faith misplaced, or did Republican get-out-the-vote efforts stem the Democrats’ rising tide? Hard to say, though Heather Wilson’s narrow victory, for example, clearly benefited from GOP GOTV.

Hurricane Flooding Breached GOP Levee?

Do structural advantages – the wall – matter less when there is a wave of discontent? In 2006, as in 1994, we once again learned that structural advantages

⁵ Gregory L. Giroux, “Democrats Take House on Strength of Bush’s Unpopularity and GOP Scandals,” *CQ Weekly Report*, November 9, 2006, 20.

are not impregnable. We also learned, once again, that there is no such thing as a permanent minority or permanent majority. And we learned, once again, that all politics is local, except when it is national. In 2006, somewhat ironically, the all-politics-is-local shoe was on the other foot. The NRCC's defensive Tom Reynolds preached the old time Tip O'Neill gospel, while the DCCC's hard-charging Rahm Emanuel predicted correctly that a national wave was in the offing. There are limits to the advantage of incumbency; pent-up, damned-up demand eventually breaks through.

Do Campaigns Matter?

Campaigns matter at least at the margins – where, of course, many elections are won and lost – and in some years campaigns matter more than merely at the margins. Campaigns begin, of course, with party leadership attention to redistricting, retirements, recruitment, fundraising and other fundamentals. Did Republicans fail to recruit strong challengers to many Democrats because potential GOP recruits recognized that a six year itch election during time of war did not provide a propitious electoral environment for the majority party? Potential candidates could read the writing on the wall so to speak. Did Republicans lose because they ran a bad campaign, or did they run a bad campaign because they were going to lose?

A case in point might be the self-immolation of Senator George Allen. Arguably, Allen's self-destruction was premised at least in part on his presidential ambition. Without the intense scrutiny of the national press, would Allen's campaign blunders have loomed so large? Campaigns are at least in part about character and issues. If George Allen had been a more serious Senator, versed in the issues and well grounded with a legislative track record, would his verbal fumbles have mattered as much?

Let's apply the same standard to the House Republican Party as a whole. Again, did they lose because they ran a bad campaign, or did they run a bad campaign because they were going to lose? To answer this question, however, we must ask another: how did they govern? In the era of the "permanent campaign" there seems to be an inextricable link between campaigning and governing. Why? There are many good explanations for the "permanent campaign," but for our purposes three stand out.⁶ First, journalists emphasize entertainment over enlightenment, conflict over compromise, opposition over governing – in other words, campaigning over governing. Second, political science has taught journalists that politicians act out of ambition and a desire for re-election, so why not conflate campaigning and governing? Third, the permanent campaign may not

⁶ Norm Ornstein and Tom Mann, *The Permanent Campaign and its Future* (Washington: AEI and Brookings, 2000). See especially chapter one by Hugh Hecl.

be entirely new; it may be premised on James Madison's two-year House term tread mill. Thus, in examining the House Republican campaign, we need to ask: how did they govern?

Again, campaigns are at least in part about character and issues. Character naturally looms larger in presidential elections than congressional elections because the presidency is in the first instance a single individual – the president – while Congress is a complex institution made up of many individuals. Nevertheless, character counts even in congressional elections, as witness those Members who lost re-election because of scandal. Parties, too, may lose in part on character – call it a “culture of corruption.” In the 109th Congress, the House GOP seemed somewhat in disarray on questions of ethics. They could not, for example, effectively address earmark reform. Nor were they able to manage the Foley fall out, in part because the leadership failed to bring both Democratic and Republican members of the page board into the equation.

The Governing Party?

House GOP disarray on ethics mirrored similar disarray on policy. As mentioned, the House Republicans fumbled earmark reform. Likewise, President Bush's Social Security reform effort seemed stillborn. Immigration reform found House Republicans fighting more with Senate Republicans and the White House, than with Democrats. Thanks to the constitutional separation of powers and bicameralism, we have what Charles O. Jones calls a “government of parties,” rather than party government. Furthermore, House Democrats' discipline and unity in opposition contributed to divisions among Republicans. For example, Nancy Pelosi's ability to have House Democrats hold the line on retaining Sensenbrenner's “felony” provision in the House immigration bill made political life more difficult for the House GOP. Congressional Republicans, of course, were also not in accord on the Iraq War, not least because war is an issue by its very nature that is difficult, not to say impossible, to manage. Wars never go according to plan, including on the home front.

In the 109th Congress, Congressional Republicans were in disarray – or more accurately, meltdown mode. Indeed, they looked a lot like Democrats in the lead up to the 1994 election: policy disarray coupled with the politics of scandal, chaos and factionalism within their ranks, and at odds with a President of their own party. Immigration reform in 2006 may have been the functional equivalent of Hillary's early 1990s health care reform debacle. In 1994 and 2006 the majority party in Congress provided palpable, empirical evidence that they were in trouble and that they were going to lose their majorities. So how did they govern? They didn't. In 2006, the *House* Republicans in particular were clearly not the “governing” party. Like House Democrats in 1994, House Republicans in 2006

could not govern the country, could not govern Congress – indeed, they could not govern themselves. They were ineffective at campaigning because they were ineffective at governing. They ran a bad campaign because they were going to lose.

Legislative Party Strategy

Government or opposition? Pursuing policy or playing politics? Compromise or confrontation?

Our two political parties constantly face these choices. The “government or opposition” strategic dilemma is a true constant of legislative politics. This conundrum factionalizes internally both Republicans and Democrats, both the majority and the minority parties in Congress. The dilemma may in fact be a conundrum in the true sense of the word: there may be no right answer to the question, though the question clearly matters.

The constancy of this conundrum suggests that the Constitution governs. Indeed, the Constitution governs in a way that neither party governs. Neither party in our separation of powers system is ever simply the government or the opposition. Instead, each party is constantly wracked on the horns of this dilemma. The Constitution governs in the sense that each party is perpetually divided into internal party factions contending over the correct answer to this legislative party strategic dilemma. Certainly Republicans and Democrats constantly fight *between* themselves, but both parties just as constantly fight *among* themselves. There are various causes of intra-party factionalism, of course, yet one constant of intra-party warfare is the struggle over the correct answer to the “government or opposition” dilemma.

In the British Parliamentary system the majority party is the government and the minority party is the loyal opposition. Legislative parties in the American separation of powers system face a more complex calculus, especially under conditions of divided government, but just as frequently under conditions of united party government. Just ask Congressional Republicans following the 2006 election. Congressional party leaders must regularly decide whether to be part of the “government” or part of the “opposition,” whether to cooperate or compete with the President, whether to engage in the politics of accommodation or confrontation, whether to legislate or “wedgistrate,” whether to play politics or promote policy.

Of course, in our separation of powers system politics and policy remain inextricably intertwined, consequently compromise and confrontation are both natural and desirable in American politics. This institutional contribution to the inevitable heterogeneity of our political parties is absent in the British parliamentary model. The constitutional separation of powers remains a strong

determinant of congressional behavior, as can be seen, for example, in Rahm Emanuel and Tom Reynolds debating whether the 2006 election was going to be “national” or “local.”

Yet Democrats were also divided *among* themselves over the best strategy as well. The well-publicized 2006 clash between the DNC’s Howard Dean and the DCCC’s Emanuel provides concrete evidence of Madison’s meddling in our politics. House Democrats have been internally divided for many years on questions of legislative party strategy. Hamlet-like, they debated “to Contract or not to Contract” throughout the past year, finally settling – sort of – on “Six for ‘06.” Similarly, Democrats were split between their liberal base and more moderate mainstream voters on the central question of the day: Iraq. They debated incessantly whether to adopt a high profile confrontational strategy sharpening their differences with the White House, thus providing a choice and not an echo, or whether to play rope a dope on Iraq, criticizing Bush policy without clearly articulating an alternative policy. Jack Murtha seemingly settled that debate, even if Minority Leader Pelosi only tepidly followed his lead.

Of course, 2006 did not provide House Democrats their first opportunity for internecine warfare. The 2002 experience of House Democrats following yet another disappointing election also underscored the central importance of legislative party strategy. In the aftermath of the 2002 midterm elections, dispirited Democrats engaged in a round of finger pointing, blaming House Democratic Leader Dick Gephardt for their purported failure to compete effectively during the previous legislative session with President Bush. Following the midterm election, Gephardt stepped down as House Democratic Leader having failed to lead his party out of the minority in four straight elections.

During 2002 election postmortems, many argued that Democrats lost House and Senate seats in the midterm election because congressional Democrats failed to offer a clear alternative to President Bush on taxes and Iraq. Democrats openly debated whether to be part of the “government” or part of the “opposition.” They debated whether they should have stood on principle and confronted President Bush on tax cuts and war as their liberal wing wished, or whether they should have adopted a more accommodating centrism in order to blunt GOP issues and appeal to swing voters. The ensuing House Democratic leadership contest involving Nancy Pelosi and Martin Frost highlighted their different approaches to legislative party strategy.

At the time, Charlie Cook summarized the Democrats’ dilemma:

As Democrats attempt to regroup from their November 5 [2002] losses, they are trying to decide how to reposition their party. Should they move to the left, as some have suggested, to show that they ‘stand for something’ and provide ‘a real choice’ not just a ‘Republican-lite’ alternative? Or should they move toward the middle? Or should they take the slightly different

‘New Democrat’ approach advocated by the Democratic Leadership Council?

As with the ascendancy of Newt Gingrich in the 1990s, central to Pelosi’s 2002 leadership contest victory was the question of legislative party strategy. Pelosi, the “Lady Macbeth of Politics” according to the *Washington Post*, did not mince words:

We have to have the resources and then target them – this is going to sound harsh – in the most cold-blooded possible way. This is about winning the 11 – and I want 22 – seats that we need to win the House back. So it’s not about being nice. I didn’t come into this to win any popularity contests. I came in to win the election. So I have been brutally cold-blooded. When we make these decisions [about which candidate to support], no four-chambered creatures need come to the table. We want reptilian, cold-blooded creatures.”⁷

Pelosi went on to link legislative party strategy and message to recruitment, fundraising and GOTV efforts, critiquing the strategy of her predecessor, Dick Gephardt. “There was a decision not to have a message nationally. You can’t mobilize without a message.” In September 2004 House Democrats led by Pelosi rolled out their “New Partnership for America’s Future” national message. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Newt Gingrich probably smiled upon learning about this Democratic contract.

Fortunately for the minority party, the majority party also confronts the same conundrum. Commentator David Brooks noted “a paradox: the bigger GOP majorities [following 2002 and 2004] will make it harder to establish one-party rule ... the Republican win may actually mean less one-party dominance”⁸ Brooks predicted – presciently it seems – that Republicans would become even more discordant, assertive and fractious. He might have added that they might also become more arrogant and more likely to overplay their hand vis-à-vis the minority party, the Senate, and the White House. Arguably, they did all of the above in the 109th Congress.

Newt and Nancy

Leadership fights are in part surrogates for factional struggles over legislative party strategy. The “young turk” Newt Gingrich challenged the “old guard” Bob Michel. Similarly, Nancy Pelosi rejected Dick Gephardt’s less aggressive

⁷ Charles Babington and Brian Faler, “Hard-Line Polity to Secure House Majority,” *Washington Post*, July 29, 2004, A26.

⁸ David Brooks, “Strength in Disunity,” *New York Times*, November 23, 2004, online.

approach. The parallel is intriguing: to win her 2006 House majority did Pelosi become Gingrichian? In January 2005 *The Economist* wondered whether Democrats might become *insufficiently* Gingrichian, embracing “his passion for pugilism without embracing his passion for ideas.” They went on to editorialize, “By all means let the Democrats learn from Newt the fighter; but if they want to recapture power they need to learn from Newt the thinker, too.”⁹ Did Nancy become sufficiently like Newt?

She imitated Gingrich’s Contract with her “Six for ’06.” Along with Rahm Emanuel, she mimicked Gingrich’s aggressive GOPAC recruiting efforts. Most importantly perhaps, she adopted a clearly confrontational legislative floor strategy sharpening differences with Republicans. She followed Jack Murtha’s lead on Iraq. She held her troops in line on key floor votes such as Medicare Prescription Drugs and Immigration Reform. On the former, she forced House Republicans into the now infamous three-hour long count, thanks to David Wu’s stolid loyalty, resulting in endless bad publicity for the majority. On the latter, she left Republicans squirming under Sensenbrenner’s “felony” amendment. Was the 2006 Democratic victory Pelosi’s reward for her Gingrichian efforts?

Fairly or not, Newt and Nancy are widely credited with their party victories in 1994 and 2006. Do minority parties win majorities, or do majority parties lose their majorities, as former political scientist and long time House Republican Bill Thomas once insisted? “Incumbents beat themselves. The majority beats itself. And the question is how long can you sustain the particular mix at the particular time to allow you to maintain the majority?”¹⁰ Following the 2006 election, commentator Mark Shields concluded that the majority party beat itself: “This was not a Democratic victory; it was a Republican defeat.”¹¹ Similarly, Charlie Cook observed:

Midterm elections are about punishing. They’re driven by anger – anger and/or fear. And if Democrats see this as a mandate, I think they’re crazy; if they see this as an opportunity, then I think they’re smart. Because nobody voted for Democrats, they voted against Republicans.¹²

If the majority parties beat themselves in 1994 and 2006, they did so with the disarray brought on by internal party factionalism. Yet can the conventional wisdom crediting the minority party leadership of Newt and Nancy be completely wrong? Both leaders in opposition unified their parties behind a strategy of confrontation. Gingrich gained support from moderates like Bill Frenzel and

⁹ Lexington, “The Return of the Newt,” *The Economist*, January 22, 2005, 34.

¹⁰ Personal interview with the author, July 2004.

¹¹ Mark Shields, *PBS NewsHour*, November 8, 2006.

¹² C-span, “AARP Panel on 2006 Midterm Election,” November 8, 2006.

Nancy Johnson, and unified House Republicans behind the Contract. Pelosi did something similar. Perhaps the key to the strategic dilemma facing congressional parties – government or opposition? compromise or confrontation? – is found in successfully managing internal party factionalism. The split over legislative strategy is found *within* the two parties, more than *between* the two parties. Even if the majority party creates the wave, the minority party must be prepared to ride the wave. Some credit seems due both to Gingrich in 1994 and Pelosi in 2006. Of course, the challenge for the new majority party is to continue to manage the factionalism within their own party.

Controlling the Mischiefs of Faction

Following the 2006 election, a *Washington Post* headline captured that challenge perfectly: “Election Battles Are Over; Let the Infighting Begin.”¹³ In an inauspicious beginning that might not have surprised James Madison, the new majority party in the House found itself in disarray even before taking power. To the dismay of many in her party, Speaker-to-be Pelosi picked a fight with fellow Democratic leader Steny Hoyer by actively supporting Jack Murtha for Majority Leader against Hoyer. She lost, but not without first learning that it may be easier to maintain party unity in the minority than in the majority. Being in the majority is tougher than playing minority opposition. Just ask former backbench bomb thrower Newt Gingrich. If Democrats hope to retain their majority following the 110th Congress they will need to control the mischiefs of faction within their own ranks. If they fail to do so, they may provide Republicans the opportunity the GOP provided them in the 2006 elections.

Democrats won in 2006 in part by invading Republican turf and running more moderate or even conservative candidates in Republican-leaning districts. Pelosi will need to balance the interests of their newly enlarged Blue Dog faction with that of the old bull committee chairs, many of whom come from the liberal wing of the party, and the Congressional Black Caucus, another bastion of largely liberal-leaning Members. Democrats must satisfy their base without alienating mainstream voters. Already Pelosi seems sensitive, for example, to the need to rein in those like soon-to-be Judiciary Committee Chair John Conyers who have begun to talk about impeaching President Bush.

Pelosi seems to part company with Gingrich on one important particular. In 1992 Gingrich adopted a lose-the-White-House-to-win-the-House strategy. It worked. In winning Congress, Democrats may have made winning the White House in 2008 more difficult for their party. Democrats may find themselves torn between retaining their majority in 2008 or winning the White House. Certainly

¹³ Zachary A. Goldfarb, “Election Battles Are Over; Let the Infighting Begin,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 2006, A5.

they will find themselves as a caucus frequently torn between competing institutional imperatives. If Democrats hope to contribute to governing the country, they must first govern Congress, and above all they must govern themselves. Certainly Madison has not made their job easy.

The ever-insightful Charlie Cook recently said about Congress:

[N]obody has been in control for the last two years, and I don't think anybody is going to be in complete control for the next two years. I mean ... when you've got majorities that are this narrow, nobody is in control. You may have a majority, you may have some perks and some advantages, and you've got the gavel, you can schedule legislation, but you don't have control of the place... Democrats can sort of steer things a little bit, but they're not in control.¹⁴

Cook is right. The majority party in Congress is not the government, nor is the minority party merely the opposition, whether under conditions of divided government or even under conditions of so-called "united party government." Neither Democrats, nor Republicans govern; rather the Constitution governs. Evidence for this proposition includes electoral challenges such as the six year itch, but it also includes the strategic dilemma always confronting both Democrats and Republicans as they struggle to maintain party unity in order to gain or retain a legislative majority. In managing its own factions, each party faces a constitutional constant: the Scylla and Charbydis of government or opposition, compromise or confrontation, policy or politics.

¹⁴ C-span:, AARP Panel on 2006 Midterm Election," November 8, 2006.

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2006 MIDTERMS: POST-ELECTION APPRAISAL

Assessing Howard Dean's Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections

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Assessing Howard Dean's Fifty State Strategy and the 2006 Midterm Elections

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Abstract

Throughout the 2006 midterm elections, the press wrote about the conflict over campaign strategy between Howard Dean, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and his counterparts in Congress, Chuck Schumer and Rahm Emmanuel, the heads of the Senate and House campaigns, respectively. Schumer and Emmanuel, as well as other Beltway strategists, disagreed with Dean's "fifty state strategy" to build the party across the nation, arguing that DNC funds should focus on the races targeted by the congressional parties. This essay explains, in part, why Dean's popularity suffers in Washington – even after decisive Democratic victories – and why he continues to have support outside the Beltway. It also provides preliminary evidence that Dean's fifty-state strategy paid off in terms of increasing the Democratic vote share beyond the bounce of a national tide favoring Democrats.

KEYWORDS: congressional elections, political parties, midterms

When Howard Dean, the former Governor of Vermont and former presidential candidate, ran for Chairman of the Democratic National Committee he promised a “fifty State Strategy” as a means of re-building the Democratic Party after their latest national electoral defeat. The strategy was enthusiastically embraced by the 365 members of the DNC and by January 2005 Dean had gotten enough commitments to win the Chairmanship of the Party. But the enthusiasm felt for Dean by the members of the Democratic National Committee, the vast majority of whom are elected in state party processes far removed from Washington D.C., was not shared by that amorphous group of Congressmen, Senators, party fund raisers, political consultants, lobbyists and political reporters who, at one time or another constitute “the Washington establishment.” The Congressional leadership even went so far as to recruit a former member of Congress to run against Dean in an ill-fated attempt to influence the process.

Insider antipathy to Howard Dean pre-dated his run for national party chair. Many members of the Washington D.C. Democratic establishment had been turned off by Dean’s meteoric rise and fall as a presidential candidate. His early opposition to the war struck those accustomed to Bill Clinton’s careful centrism as “radical.” But even as the rest of the Democratic Party and eventually the rest of the country caught up to Dean’s opinion on the war in Iraq, animosity remained. By early 2006 Dean was making innocuous statements such as “We can’t win the war in Iraq the way we’re fighting it,” – a sentiment widely shared by members of the public – and still causing apoplexy among the Washington establishment.

The underlying source of suspicion about Howard Dean had to do with the “net roots” movement his presidential campaign had sparked. In 2003 the energy of internet contributors had allowed Dean to come from behind in the race for the Democratic nomination, surprising the rest of the field and eclipsing the big money mandarins of the Democratic Party. Establishment types looked upon his \$40 million with a mixture of awe and suspicion. When it turned out that Dean’s campaign had blown through most of that \$40 million and failed to build a real political machine in the two early states of Iowa and New Hampshire, establishment types breathed a sigh of relief. For them, the “scream” was the final proof positive that Dean was a dangerous type.

But the suspicion Dean engendered inside the Beltway was swamped by the enthusiasm he engendered outside the Beltway once he ran for Party Chairman. Little town and city Democratic committees all over the country passed resolutions which were then sent on to their state’s Democratic National Committee members urging them to vote for Dean. Once Dean took over the National Committee, he reigned in his outgoing personality and more or less tried to conquer the doubts of the Washington insiders. Predictions that he would be a terrible fundraiser, made mostly by the rich fundraisers he initially ignored, turned

out to be false as his fundraising exceeded the fundraising of his predecessor. More importantly, Dean's money came primarily from the internet and small contributors, an important breakthrough for the Party given that it was now operating in a reform environment where "soft money" (large contributions from wealthy individuals) had been banned. In the year before the midterm elections of 2006, the Democratic National Committee raised \$142.6 million in "hard" (i.e. federal) dollars, compared to \$59.7 million in 2001 - the year before the previous midterm elections. This amount of hard money exceeded both the hard and soft dollars raised in the previous election cycle.¹

With sufficient funds at his disposal Dean went about making good on his campaign promises to rebuild the *entire* Democratic Party from the ground up. This began with an extensive series of state "assessments." Not surprisingly, many Democratic State parties were in sorry shape. The new state party chairman of North Dakota, David Strauss, took over the party only to find, to his dismay, that it had IRS problems and FEC problems that needed to be straightened out before he could even think about getting the party in shape to help protect Senator Kent Conrad from what looked like a tough re-election fight. (Conrad eventually won re-election with 69% of the vote.) The DNC sent in legal and accounting assistance. Other state parties needed technology directors, communications directors, press secretaries and organizers. Both red states and blue states got attention. In Kansas they focused on the re-election of Governor Kathleen Sebelius; in South Dakota they focused on recruiting 90 legislative candidates compared to only 66 in the previous midterm election years and on defeating a ballot measure that would have banned all abortions. Very Democratic states like Massachusetts got staff to help take back the governor's office which had been held by Republicans for more than a decade in spite of the overall Democratic strength in the state. And New York State got organizers who focused on the often neglected Republican counties in upstate New York.

By the end of Dean's first year in office, the fifty state strategy was in full swing. The DNC was paying for 183 people working for state parties as part of their coordinated campaigns. Most of this work went on below the radar screen. Dean mostly stayed out of the limelight and tried hard to lessen the inside the Beltway animosity towards him. Although the fifty state strategy was in place it was not the stuff political reporters were fond of talking about and so Dean's Chairmanship proceeded along on two tracks – inside the Beltway where various and sundry "unnamed sources" continued to attack his leadership of the Party and predict that he would not survive his four year term, and outside the Beltway where state party chairmen remained exceedingly grateful for the help they were getting from Washington.

¹ The DNC had raised \$68.6 million in soft dollars and \$59.7 million in hard dollars in 2001. See www.fec.gov/press/press2006/20060216party.html.

In the meantime the Bush Administration was imploding. Just as Dean was sending his organizers into the field, the Administration's inept response to Hurricane Katrina put the first serious dent in George Bush's popularity. That and the increasingly bad news from the war in Iraq meant that the Republican Party was looking very vulnerable in the upcoming midterm elections which were shaping up to be the political version of the "perfect storm." The Senate and House party committees were raising loads of money – much of it from the big contributors who felt snubbed by Howard Dean and his internet cash. The hard charging Chairs of those committees, Senator Chuck Schumer and Congressman Rahm Emmanuel, were able to recruit high quality candidates for many offices and promise them funding. Because of the fifty state strategy potential candidates in some key congressional districts found a party infrastructure where none had previously existed.

No one in Washington had paid much attention to Dean's fifty state strategy until the prospect for a big win in November became very realistic. At that point Schumer and Emmanuel went to Howard Dean and asked him to transfer \$10 to their two committees. Dean said no, and – to make a long story short – Emmanuel exploded, calling the fifty state strategy a waste of time.² The conflict brought all the latent resentment towards Dean to the surface and magnified what was becoming a tale of two parties – one in Washington and one in the states; the first one reported on by "big foot" reporters and latter praised in the blogosphere. As the fall election season heated up, the financial cost of Dean's fifty state strategy became clear and he came under increasing criticism for having spent money broadly and on a dubious strategy. Dean and the leaders of the congressional party eventually compromised and Dean put some money, although not as much as Emmanuel wanted, into the Congressional campaigns.

Many who had watched this brawl with dismay figured that it was over the day after Election Day. The Democratic sweep was so broad and so deep that it looked like everyone had won. Emmanuel had taken back the House; Schumer had taken back the Senate. Democrats had picked up six Governorships and a large number of down ballot races. And Democrats now controlled both legislative chambers in 23 states – more than they had held since 1994. The recruitment and fundraising skills of the two congressional campaign committee chairs, Schumer and Emmanuel, came in for praise, as did Howard Dean for having made inroads into red states and for picking up many lower level offices that would constitute the "farm team" for future national elections and control for the 2010 redistricting.

And then, to the surprise of many, in the midst of the celebration, two respected consultants in the Democratic Party, James Carville and Stan

² See, Matt Bai, "Is Howard Dean willing to destroy the Democratic Party in order to save it? *The New York Times Magazine*, October 1, 2006.

Greenberg, opened up the argument all over again – telling a group of Washington political journalists that the Democrats would have picked up even more seats had Dean not been so stingy and so stuck on his fifty state strategy. Carville went so far as to advocate that Harold Ford Jr., the defeated Senate candidate in Tennessee, replace Dean as party chairman.

The post-election attack on Dean died quickly, with Congressman Emmanuel and other congressional leaders praising Dean, and with state party chairmen, the only people with actual votes and control of votes, reasserting their support of Dean. Former Party Chairman Don Fowler put the whole thing in perspective when he told a reporter, “Asking Dean to step down now, after last week, is equivalent to asking Eisenhower to resign after the Normandy invasion.”³ The blogosphere persisted in characterizing the whole debate as between the old corrupt political consultants in Washington, who just want to make money from media buys, versus the new virtuous grassroots party.

But the persistence of the debate is no accident. After nearly half a century of paying obeisance to the god of television in political campaigns the internet has opened up a new front in political campaigns; one that threatens the status quo and the people who made their living from television. The internet allows for the return of old fashioned political organizing. Ironically, it was the Republicans that brought it back. Their vaunted 72 hour program, based on careful targeting and intense door to door canvassing, surprised the Democrats in 2002 and then again in 2004. In the latter election Democrats broke previous turnout records only to find that the Republicans had outdone them on the ground.

The shift in political campaigns from the “air war” to the “ground war” shifts power from Washington and the centralized party committees and professional consultants to the states and localities. Since campaign dollars are always scarce, especially on the Democratic side, it is worth trying to figure out, in some systematic way, what exactly the new emphasis on the ground war is worth. The problem with doing this, however, is the problem that political scientists always face in evaluating election outcomes – how much of the outcome is due to the actions and tactics of the campaigns and how much is due to forces beyond the control of the campaigns? Political journalists have a bias in favor of the campaign story. They attribute victory to this ad or that debate moment. Political scientists, in contrast, have a bias in favor of the long term trends because these can be measured and quantified.

³ See “The Odd Attack on Dean” at www.thenation.com/doc/20061211/editors.

Assessing the Fifty State Strategy

Thus, in order to isolate the value of Dean's fifty state strategy it is important to control for the extremely powerful events surrounding the election itself. Democrats were enormously advantaged by unhappiness with President Bush and his conduct of the war in Iraq. The election became nationalized as had no midterm election since 1994 and this most powerful factor had little to do with what Dean or Emmanuel or Schumer did or didn't do. The most powerful factor was what George Bush didn't do and that was to conduct the war in Iraq in such a way as to show progress, if not victory.

It is impossible to separate the effects of the fifty state strategy from the effects of the overall war in Iraq and unhappiness with George Bush when it comes to statewide races. Since Dean placed paid DNC staff in every single state and since the differences in numbers of staff in each state is not great, there is no way to figure out if the fifty state strategy made a difference in Senate and Gubernatorial races. The DNC's own literature trumpets improved performance in Butler County, Ohio where the Democratic vote increased by nearly 50% over the 2004 vote, contributing no doubt, to the election of a Democratic Senator and Governor in Ohio. The DNC also claims credit for helping bring Senate candidate Amy Klobuchar from behind by contacting 1.6 million new voters to win a Senate seat in Minnesota, among other important victories.⁴ But one could just as easily argue that Senator Schumer deserves the lion's share of credit for the Senate takeover. He recruited candidates like pro-lifer Bob Casey Jr. in Pennsylvania (to the consternation of his own liberal constituents in New York) because he judged, correctly, that they could win. Victory in the statewide races has a thousand fathers. Thus, there is no systematic way to test the fifty state strategy in statewide races.

The House races, however, are a different story. While most of the paid DNC staff were working in state headquarters, helping with communications or other functions that would benefit *all* Democrats in the state, there were some DNC staff that worked through the coordinated campaign efforts with state parties and focused on specific congressional districts. In some instances, the organizers were assigned a congressional district before it was clear that the district would have a viable candidate or that it would even be competitive. Organizers were placed in some districts where the goal was to harvest Democratic votes that had shown up in 2004 in the hopes that they could be enticed to vote for Governor or Senator in 2006. The result was that in 2006 it was possible to identify 39 congressional districts where Dean had made an investment in organizing.

⁴ Email message from Governor Howard Dean to DNC members, 11/08/06.

But before we try and figure out if the fifty state strategy made a difference in those 39 congressional districts we need to come up with some way of measuring the advantage for Democrats in 2006 across the board due to national trends stemming from opposition to the war in Iraq and President Bush. To do this I compared the change in the Democratic vote from 2002 to 2006 in every congressional district in the country. I chose 2002 instead of 2004 since the increase in the electorate that comes with a presidential election would distort the comparison between elections. Comparing one midterm to a previous midterm makes the most sense. I then calculated the average change in the Democratic vote between 2002 and 2006. In making this calculation I left out those congressional districts where the candidate ran unopposed or where the candidate faced minor opposition from a splinter party. There were 63 districts in that category in 2002 and 40 in that category in 2006.⁵ Since those districts would tend to show changes in the neighborhood of 80 to 100 % their inclusion would distort the overall averages.

I then calculated the change in the Democratic vote between 2002 and 2006 in the congressional districts that had had the attention of a DNC organizer acting through the state party's coordinated campaign. Out of 39 congressional districts four had had no Democratic candidate running in 2002 and thus I left them out of the calculations since the large percentage in change in the Democratic vote would distort the overall average. The results are summarized in Table 1 below, and a full list of these districts is provided in Appendix A.

Table 1. Average Change in Democratic Vote, 2002 to 2006

All Contested Districts (N=390)	Contested Districts with DNC Organizers in 2006 (N=35)
+4.7%	+9.8%

As Table 1 indicates, those congressional districts where the DNC had paid organizers on the ground for over a year more than doubled the Democratic vote over what would have happened due to forces outside the control of the Party, such as the war in Iraq and the unpopularity of a Republican President. This is a powerful testament to the value of a long-term party building approach. Gains in the Democratic vote occurred where the Democrat won and where the Democrat

⁵ House Races where there was no opponent or no major party candidate opponent.
 2002 Total = 63 (Democrats = 20, Republicans = 43)
 2006 Total = 40 (Democrats = 31, Republicans = 9)

lost. The Democratic candidate won in 20 of the 39 districts where the DNC had organizers but this should not detract from the accomplishment of dramatically increasing the vote in those districts. In some places the organizer's initial and primary responsibility was to increase the vote in order to impact statewide races. In others the Democrats created a swing district where there had been none before.

This finding, while an impressive testament to the value of campaign activity in a district, does not settle the argument over the 50 state strategy. Many of the districts that had the benefit of a DNC organizer were also districts that were targeted by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and received significant national attention. So the next step in trying to determine what matters is to arrange the districts targeted by Dean according to the amount of money the DCCC contributed to the Democrat in those districts. I did this in Appendix B, which shows how much the DCCC contributed in each of these seats and the percentage change in Democratic vote share for that district. Clearly, there is not a simple linear progression: more money is not necessarily related to greater increases in the Democratic vote.

For the sake of brevity, Table 2 summarizes the results of the analysis. It suggests that, in the absence of significant amounts of DCCC money, the presence of a DNC organizer in a congressional district puts the average Democratic increase in the vote significantly above what would be expected simply given the anti-Republican currents in the country in 2006. Districts that had less than \$10,000 from the DCCC still exceeded the average national increase by nearly 3 percentage points. Districts that received between \$10,000 and \$100,000 exceeded the average national increase by nearly 4 percentage points. Not surprisingly, those districts that received between \$100,000 and \$200,000 in DCCC contributions exceeded the national average by over 8 percentage points. These districts also exceeded the average increase for the districts with a DNC organizer. Obviously money matters. But what is interesting about this table is how much can be accomplished with organization. Since there were only two districts that were targeted by the 50 state strategy that received more than \$200,000 I would not make too much of this finding. Keep in mind that it is often argued that there are diminishing returns to money in politics.

Table 2. Average Change in Democratic Vote 2002 – 2006 by amount of DCCC contribution (contested districts only)

Average increase in Democratic vote, DCCC contributions under \$10,000.	7.4% (N=7)
Average increase in Democratic vote, DCCC contributions >\$10,000 and <\$100,000 = 8.4%	8.4% (N=12)
Average increase in Democratic vote, DCCC contributions >\$100,000 and <\$200,000	13% (N=14)
Average increase in Democratic vote, DCCC contributions > \$200,000 = 4.5%	4.5% (N=2)

Lessons?

It is not surprising to find out that organizing matters and so does money. But to place this debate in the context of modern political history it is useful to note that for many years now, the national Democratic Party has lagged behind the national Republican Party when it came to the technology of elections. A large part of Governor Howard Dean's attractiveness to the state and local party people who elected him was the hope that he would revitalize parties. As Chairman he has had to pick his battles inside the Beltway with care, knowing that he was in hostile territory from the beginning. But the strong increase in Democratic performance in Dean's targeted districts should settle the debate for the time being. Senator Harry Reid, the new majority leader had to admit "I didn't support his running for chair of the DNC... I was wrong. He was right. I support his grassroots Democratic Party-building."⁶

⁶ *The Nation*, Ibid.

Appendix A. Outcome of Congressional District Races where DNC organizers had been working for over 16 months

(* indicates no Democratic Candidate ran in 2002.)

(** indicates average percentage change not including non-contested races.)

Congressional District	Democratic Win/Loss	Increase or Decrease in Democratic % of vote
Arizona 5	Win	+14%
Arizona 8	Win	+20%
Colorado 4	Loss	+1%
Colorado 7	Win	+8%
Conn 2	Win	+4%
Conn 4	Loss	+12%
Conn 5	Win	+13%
Florida 9	Loss	+15%
Florida 13	Loss	+5%
Florida 22	Win	+12%
Hawaii #2	Win	+5%
Indiana 2	Win	+8%
Indiana 8	Win	+15%
Indiana 9	Win	-1%
Kansas #2	Win	+13%
Kentucky 4	Loss	-7%
Minnesota #6	Loss	+7
*Nebraska #1	Loss	+41%
Nevada #2	Loss	+25%
Nevada #3	Loss	+10%
New Hampshire #2	Win	+12%
New Jersey #7	Loss	+7%
New Mexico #1	Loss	+5%
New York #20	Win	+29%
*New York 24	Win	+54%
New York 25	Loss	22%
New York 29	Loss	+27%
North Carolina 8	Loss	+6%
North Carolina 11	Win	+11%
Ohio 1	Loss	+12%
Ohio 15	Loss (recount underway)	+16%
*Ohio 18	Win	+62%
PA 6	Loss	0%
PA 7	Win	+22%
PA 8	Win	+13%
*PA 10	Win	+53%
SC #5	Win	-29%
Virginia # 2	Loss	0%
Washington # 8	Loss	+12%
**TOTAL		344/35 = 9.8%

Average increase in Democratic percentage of the vote in contested House Races between 2002 and 2004 = 4.7 (1840/390 = 4.7).

Appendix B. Fifty State Strategy Congressional Districts by DCCC money spent. (DCCC spending figures from www.opensecrets.org. * indicates previously uncontested race which is not included in averages)

District	Candidate	DCCC contribution	Increase or Decrease in Democratic % of the vote
FLA #13	Christine Jennings	0	+5%
Hawaii #2	Mazie Hirono	0	+5%
IN #9	Baron Hill	0	-1%
MN #6	Patricia Wetterling	0	+7%
KS #2	Nancy Boyda	\$500	+13%
NY #25	Dan Maffei	\$5000	+22%
PA #10*	Chris Carney	\$6000	+53%
CO #4	Angie Paccione	\$8,200	+1%
			Average increase in Democratic vote contributions under \$10,000 = 7.4%
NY #29	Eric Massa	\$12,500	+27%
NE #1*	Maxine Moul	\$14,000	+41%
SC #5	John Spratt	\$14,350	- 29%
FLA #9	Phyllis Busansky	\$19,871	+15%
NH #2	Paul Hodes	\$28,785	+12%
NJ #7	Linda Stender	\$30,487	+7%
NC #8	Larry Kissell	\$46,260	+6%
VA #2	Phillip Kellam	\$61,404	0%
PA #8	Patrick Murphy	\$64, 152	+13%
Ohio #18*	Zachary Space	\$69,105	+62%
Nevada #3	Tessa Hafen	\$69,927	+10%
PA #7	Joe Sestak	\$72,775	+22%
CN #2	Joseph Courtney	\$79,260	+4%
AZ #5	Harry Mitchell	\$83,679	+14%
			Average increase in Democratic vote, >\$10,000 and <\$100,000 = 8.4%
NC #11	Joseph Shuler	\$108,550	+11%
Nevada #2	Jill Derby	\$116,227	+25%
NY #20	Kirsten Gillibrand	\$121,853	+29%
AZ #8	Gabrielle Giffords	\$122,884	+20%
FLA #22	Ron Klein	\$127,832	+12%
IN #2	Joseph Donnelly	\$131,490	+8%
WA #8	Darcy Burner	\$149,680	+ 12%
CN #4	Dianne Farrell	\$150,130	+12%
Ohio #1	John Cranley	\$156,806	+12%
IN # 8	Brad Ellsworth	\$175,371	+15%
CO #7	Edwin Perlmutter	\$175,484	+8%
NM #1	Patricia Madrid	\$177,349	+5%
PA # 6	Lois Murphy	\$185,852	0%
CN #5	Chris Murphy	\$199, 252	+13%

			Average increase in Democratic vote >\$100,000 and <\$200,000 = 13%
KY #4	Ken Lucas	\$202,169	-7%
Ohio #15	Mary Kilroy	\$266,945	+16%
NY #24*	Michael Arcuri	\$257,033	+54%
			Average increase in Democratic vote > \$200,000 = 4.5%

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2006 MIDTERMS: POST-ELECTION APPRAISAL

A Regional Analysis of the 2006 Midterms

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A Regional Analysis of the 2006 Midterms*

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Abstract

For only the sixth time since 1900, control of both the House and Senate switched during a midterm cycle in the 2006 congressional elections. Although the magnitude of the changes was not as great as 1994, the results from 2006 more fully aligned the two parties' control of Congress with their presidential performance in the Electoral College. Democrats now dominate the Northeast in the same way Republicans dominate the South. For the first time in decades, Democrats will govern as a solidly non-Southern party. At the same time, Republicans face the challenge of overcoming the perils of regional over-representation and a drift to the right, as suggested by the recent comeback of Mississippi Senator Trent Lott. In coming cycles, election battles will focus most fiercely on the 20 competitive Midwest and Interior West states.

KEYWORDS: congressional elections, political parties, midterms, southern politics

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The election of the 2006 represents a significant event in American politics. Since 1900, control of the House and Senate has shifted parties in only five previous midterm elections (1910, 1918, 1946, 1954, and 1994). In another two midterms (1986 and 2002) control of the Senate, but not the House, shifted parties.¹

While notable, the elections of 2006 do not seem to represent a fundamental shift in basic patterns of American electoral behavior. For the last fifty years, the parties have engaged in a process of shifting their regional bases. The principal source of this shift has been in the South, as the region moved from solidly Democratic to competitive to solidly Republican. A corresponding, but less significant shift saw control of the Northeast change from the Democrats to the Republicans. Evidence of the changes in regional voting patterns can be seen by comparing the House lineups in 2006 and 1954, the last election in which the Democrats regained the majority.

Table 1 shows the regional breakdown of seats held by the Democrats. In 1954, the Solid South was still much in evidence as that party controlled all but 10, or 92 percent, of the region's House seats. In contrast, the Democrats were clearly the minority party in the other regions. By 2006, however, the Democrats had become the minority party in the South, but ran much more strongly in the other regions, particularly the Northeast.

Table 1: Percent of Seats Held by Democrats, 1954 v. 2006

Region ²	1954			2006			Change in % D
	Total Seats	D Seats	% D	Total Seats	D Seats	% D	
Northeast	129	58	45%	95	70	74%	29%
Midwest	129	44	34%	100	49	49%	15%
West	57	20	35%	98	57	58%	23%
South	120	110	92%	142	57	40%	-52%
Total	435	232		435	233		

¹ In 1930, the Republicans managed to hold the House 218-216, but by the time the new Congress met (prior to the passage of the 20th Amendment this did not occur until the following December, thirteen months later) 19 representatives-elect died and Democratic victories in the ensuing special elections gave them control of the House.

² Northeast: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

These changes in regional competitiveness have also altered significantly the regional composition of the parties. As Table 2 shows, in 1954, nearly half of all Democratic House members represented the South. Today, in contrast, the Democratic caucus is relatively well balanced across all regions.

Table 2: Regional Breakdown of Democratic Seats, 1954 v. 2006

	1954			2006			Change in % of All D Seats
	Total Seats	D Seats	% of All D Seats	Total Seats	D Seats	% of All D Seats	
Northeast	129	58	25%	95	70	30%	5%
Midwest	129	44	19%	100	49	21%	2%
West	57	20	9%	98	57	24%	15%
South	120	110	47%	142	57	24%	-23%
Total	435	232		435	233		

The Republicans, however, now run the risk of regional over-representation (Table 3). In 1954, Southerners were a trivial percentage of Republican House members. Today, however, Southerners are nearly as dominant in the GOP as they were in the Democratic Party fifty years ago.

Table 3: Regional Breakdown of Republican Seats, 1954 v. 2006

	1954			2006			Change in % of All R Seats
	Total Seats	R Seats	% of All R Seats	Total Seats	R Seats	% of All R Seats	
Northeast	123	71	35%	95	25	12%	-23%
Midwest	129	85	42%	100	51	25%	-17%
West	57	37	18%	98	41	20%	2%
South	126	10	5%	142	85	42%	37%
Total	435	203		435	202		

Exit polls also show these regional differences in the House vote, with the Democrats carrying the Northeast by 28 points, the Midwest by 5 points, the West

by 11 points, while losing the South by 8 points.³ Nonetheless, the 2006 election results only contributed marginally to this trend of regional realignment. Table 4 shows that the shift away from the Republicans in 2006 was relatively evenly distributed throughout the U.S. In 2004, the Democrats received approximately 49 percent of the two-party House vote. In 2006, they increased their percentage to 54 percent, a shift of just over five percentage points.⁴ The Democrats ran a bit better than this in the Northeast and the South, but a bit behind in the Midwest and West. Exit polls show that the Democrats increased their vote by six percentage points in the Northeast and the Midwest, but only three points in the West and two points in the South.

Table 4: Democratic Percentage of Two-Party House Vote

	2004	2006	Change
Northeast	57.7%	64.3%	6.6%
Midwest	48.3%	52.5%	4.2%
West	51.5%	55.7%	4.2%
South	41.0%	46.9%	5.9%
Total	48.7%	54.0%	5.3%

The change in House seats reflects an even more pronounced regional variation. Overall, 30 seats switched from the Republicans to the Democrats in 2006.⁵ As Table 5 shows, most of these newly-captured Democratic seats were in the Northeast and the Midwest. This pattern is reinforced when we look at the percentage of GOP-held seats the Democrats flipped. Here, the Democratic gains in the Northeast and Midwest are even more evident. In the Northeast, the Democrats succeeding in winning nearly a third of the GOP held seats. In the Midwest, the Democrats took nearly one in six Republican seats.

If the year-against increases in the South between 2004 and 2006 seem a bit incongruent with the relatively low seat capture in the region, remember that not only did Democrats lose the region overall, but that the racial-partisan gerrymandering of southern House districts arguably makes the win-loss responsiveness less sensitive to electoral waves. Put more simply, the packing of Hispanic and African American voters into majority-minority districts means that

³ Exit polling data available at [<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/US/H/00/epolls.0.html>].

⁴ Figures compiled from election data purchased from Polidata (<http://www.polidata.org/>). These figures also include estimated vote totals for five uncontested House seats in Florida. For these races, I used the average number of votes for winning candidates of that party in contested races.

⁵ As we write, the election in the Florida 13th is still undecided. Republican Vern Buchanan has a slight lead, but strong evidence of voting machine irregularities in Sarasota County probably means that a final determination may be weeks or months away. All calculations include the Florida 13th as a Republican seat.

the magnitude of an electoral wave must be greater to produce the sort of changes that might be expected elsewhere. This reality is one that Democratic governors and state legislators, who are at much greater parity with Republicans than are Democrats in the Congress, ought to keep in mind as the 2010 Census approaches.

The Democrats' performance was particularly poor in the South, where they managed to only win six of the 91 GOP-held seats. And even this overstates the Democrats' accomplishments, since three of the Democratic switches resulted from very unusual circumstances. In the Texas 22nd, embattled and indicted Republican Majority Leader Tom DeLay resigned his seat and sought to withdraw from the race, but local Republicans failed in their efforts to replace him on the ballot. This forced the Republicans to mount a difficult and ultimately unsuccessful write-in campaign. Additionally, in the Florida 16th, incumbent Republican Mark Foley resigned in early October after allegations of improper conduct with congressional pages. The lateness of his resignation meant that Foley's name stayed on the ballot. In both races, had the GOP been able to place other candidates on the ballot, they almost certainly would have held the seats. Finally, one Democratic pickup came in a run-off election in the Texas 23rd, where the district was redrawn to include more Hispanics after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that its existing boundaries violated the Voting Rights Act. Without these seats, the Democrats would only have won 3 in the South, or 2 percent of all seats in the South and 3 percent of the GOP-held seats in the region.

Table 5. 2006 House Seat Switches, by Region

Region	Seats	Switches	% Switching	2004 GOP Seats	% Switching
Northeast	95	11	12%	36	31%
Midwest	100	9	9%	60	15%
West	98	4	4%	45	9%
South	142	6	4%	91	7%
Total	435	30	7%	232	13%

Another interesting result is the strange polarity in the types of districts Democrats picked up. On one extreme, Democrats unseated or replaced 10 of the 18 seats held by Republicans from the 176 districts that John Kerry and Al Gore both carried, for a 56 percent "switch" rate (see Table 6). It is least surprising that a significant share of these seats flipped, for the Republicans in them were winning despite a clear Democratic tilt in presidential elections and an undeniable voter penchant for splitting the federal tickets. Winners here include Joe Courtney (CT-2), Paul Hodes (NH-2), Ron Klein (FL-22), Dave Loebsack (IA-2), and Ed Perlmutter (CO-7).

At the other extreme, Democrats defeated 19 of the 207 Republicans, or about

9 percent, from the 237 districts that Bush carried in both 2000 and 2004. These Democratic pickups, on the other hand, are the more unlikely 2006 wins—although, as we mentioned earlier, this group includes two seats where the GOP was defending the seats of resigned members with write-in substitutes (FL-16 and TX-22). Surprise winners in this category include Jason Altmire’s victory over Melissa Hart (PA-4), Nancy Boyda’s upset of Jim Ryan (KS-2) and Harry Mitchell’s defeat of J.D. Hayworth (AZ-5).

Table 6. 2006 House Seat Switches, by Presidential Winner

2000 and 2004	Seats	Republicans	Defeated	% Switching
Both Gore and Kerry	176	18	10	56%
Either Gore or Kerry	22	7	0	0%
Bush carried twice	237	207	19	9%
Total	435	232	29⁶	13%

What is perhaps most surprising are the results from the 22 mixed districts—i.e., those that one of the past two Democratic presidential nominees carried, but not both. Oddly, none of these districts changed partisan hands. How is it that this small, middle group, which includes 15 Democrats and seven Republicans, managed to produce not a single party switch? It may simply be that this group of embattled centrists has developed special appeals to their respective constituencies. Alternatively, it may be that both parties focused so much attention on these districts, that their efforts were neutralized.

Whatever the case, these 22 incumbents may need to tread carefully in the next two years, especially since only two of them got above 55 percent of the vote. They will be among the targets that the parties will be trying to switch or defend. And among the 15 Democrats from this group, nine, or 60 percent, of them are from the South: John Barrow (GA-12); Marion Berry (AR-1); Sanford Bishop (GA-2); Lloyd Doggett (TX-25); Ruben Hinojosa (TX-15); Brad Miller (NC-13); Solomon Ortiz (TX-27); Mike Ross (AR-4); and John Tanner (TN-8). Winning narrowly during a strong Democratic year in a district that, in seven of the nine cases, Kerry lost, is a potential harbinger of electoral jeopardy for these Democrats in 2008.⁷

There are several consequences of the regional patterns resulting from the 2006 election. First, the Democrats will, for the first time in decades, govern as a solidly non-Southern party. In fact, for the first time since the 83rd Congress (1953-54), the party which controls the minority of southern seats in the House

⁶ This tabulation does not include the Texas 23rd, where the recent redrawing of the district boundaries makes it impossible for us to determine the 2004 presidential vote.

⁷ Kerry won, but Gore lost, Doggett’s and Miller’s districts; in the other seven, the reverse is true.

and Senate will nevertheless be the majority party in both chambers. The portion of non-Southerners in the Democratic caucus is even higher than it was after the Democratic landslide of 1964. In that year, 194 of 295 Democrats (66 percent) were from outside of the South. In the upcoming Congress, 177 of 233 Democrats (76 percent) will be from outside of the South. And while many Democrats from outside of the South are moderate or conservative in their views, the Democrats in the upcoming Congress will likely present the most consistently liberal governing majority in many decades, if ever. Indeed, the 110th Congress could easily be described as the most liberal in history were the size of Democratic majority as large as it was were during the Kennedy-Johnson era. Because the governing margin is so much smaller, conservative Democrats, even if smaller in proportion, will still hold significant sway.

Second, the Republicans face the challenge of overcoming the perils of regional over-representation. Parties too narrowly based in one region, especially a region that it is ideologically out of step with the rest of the country, confront the political equivalent of Gresham's law as ideologically extreme views tend to become increasingly predominant within the party. That growing ideological purity threatens to further narrow the Republican appeal to other regions, which could, in turn, make the GOP an even more regionally concentrated party.

One sign of this process might be the recent comeback of Mississippi Senator Trent Lott. Lott was forced to step down as Republican minority leader in late 2002 in response to a public outcry after he praised Strom Thurmond's segregationist 1948 presidential campaign. Shortly after the election, Lott was able to return to his party's leadership when he was elected as minority whip, albeit by only one vote. It seems unlikely that Lott would have won that election if the Republicans had maintained their majority in Congress, if only because several of the losing northern Republican Senate candidates, such as Lincoln Chafee, of Rhode Island, would have been much less likely to vote for someone with Lott's political baggage. Though much of the dust has settled since the initial controversy, the Republicans' renewed identification with Lott will surely hinder their efforts to reach out to moderate voters outside of the South.

On the other hand, the post-election leadership battles in the House reflect some recognition among Republicans that they had better be careful not to move too far to the right. Although neither Mike Pence of Indiana nor John Shadegg of Arizona are southerners, had they replaced Ohio's John Boehner and Missouri's Roy Blunt for the top two Republican leadership positions, their victories would have marked a significant shift rightward because Pence and Shadegg are ranked by the *National Journal* as two of the 10 most conservative members of the

Republican House caucus. Though nobody would call them liberals, Boehner and Blunt are ranked 46th and 76th most conservative, respectively.⁸

Conclusion

There has been a steady bifurcation of the two major parties in recent presidential contests, with Republicans dominating the Southeast, the Plains and Mountain states, as Democrats locked down the Northeast and the Pacific Coast. In 2004, just three states switched partisan hands from 2000: Iowa and New Mexico went from Al Gore in 2000 to George W. Bush in 2004, while New Hampshire flipped from Bush to John Kerry. The flip of only three states was the fewest to change since George Washington again won unanimous re-election in 1792—and Washington's selection came before the advent of popular voting in presidential elections. In short, the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections represent the most stable consecutive presidential elections in American history. The electoral map, at least for the moment, is calcifying.

This pattern of calcification and clear regional divisions to some degree also existed on the congressional level prior to 2006. What the results from 2006 did was more fully align congressional control with recent presidential outcomes. The Democrats now boast 21 of 22 House seats from the six New England states and, if Vermont's Bernie Sanders is counted as a member caucusing with the Democrats, the party controls eight of New England's 12 senators. In the Northeast and Midwest more broadly, the Democrats control a share of seats commensurate with their dominance of the region in presidential politics, and achieved such parity by purging the Rust Belt of what were once known as "Ford" or "Rockefeller-style" Republicans. Meanwhile, despite a few isolated Democratic wins in the best Democratic cycle since at least 1992, the Republicans for the most part held sway in the South, losing just six House seats and the Virginia senate seat captured by a former Republican and Reagan Navy secretary who won narrowly over one of the most self-destructive incumbent candidates in recent memory.

Whether and to what degree these regional patterns in congressional results persist will depend on a variety of factors, including but not limited to the targeting by the parties' House and Senate campaign committees, the nominees and result of the 2008 presidential election, and the competitiveness of state and local party organizations. On this last count, the trend toward regional symmetry continues, with most of Democratic gains among governors and state legislatures

⁸ Based on rankings for the 108th Congress, of the 224 members for whom the National Journal provided ideological vote scores, Pence was the fifth most conservative and Shadegg was tenth. (As of this writing, final ratings for the 109th Congress were not yet available.)

coming outside the South: Five of the six new Democratic governors elected in 2006 (Arkansas' Mike Beebe excepted) won outside the South, and in the 2004 and 2006 cycles the Democrats flipped a combined 18 state legislative chambers, only one of which was in the South.

Returning to Congress, there still exist what might be called "regionally misplaced" members of Congress for both parties—i.e., southern Democrats and northeastern Republicans. And it is quite possible that both parties have maximized their control over their regional strongholds. If true, the battle in coming cycles will focus on the more competitive Midwest and Interior West states. These 20 states were home to all but three of the 11 states decided by five points or fewer in the 2004 presidential race, the idea that these states and regions will become the central battlegrounds for the future control of Congress makes perfect sense—especially in the wake of the 2006 midterms, which aligned national legislative control more closely with presidential performance.