

The Iraq War, Partisanship, and Candidate Attributes:  
Explaining Variation in Partisan Swing in the 2006 U.S. House Elections

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Abstract: Although partisan swing is often assumed to be uniform across congressional districts, our analysis of the 2006 House elections demonstrates that systematic variation exists. In addition to incumbency status, partisanship, spending, and scandal, we find that variation in the local salience of national issues across districts affected the vote shift. Notably, partisan swing in Republican districts proved highly sensitive to the number of Iraq war deaths from that district and, to a lesser degree, to the roll-call vote of Republican House members on the war resolution. These findings have implications for theories of anticipatory representation, retrospective voting, and electoral accountability.

Few dispute that the Iraq war influenced the outcome of the 2006 midterm elections. The perceived failure of U.S. policy in Iraq contributed to President Bush's low approval rating, which in turn disadvantaged Republican congressional candidates. Pundits suggested the Democratic wave was across-the-board, contributing to the national partisan swing of the election. We analyze the partisan swing in U.S. House elections in 2006 and argue that three factors explain the variation in swing across House districts: candidate attributes, the Iraq war, and the underlying district partisanship. Regarding the Iraq war, we show that the number of district-level "hometown" fatal casualties and legislators' votes authorizing the war explain the variation in the partisan swing, though this effect is contingent on the legislator's party.

In 2006, Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives for the first time since the 1994 Republican landslide. The party captured 30 seats, producing a 233-202 House majority at the start of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. Nationally, Democrats won an estimated 54 percent of the two-party vote for the House, an increase of 5.4 percentage points from the 48.6 percent they garnered in 2004.<sup>1</sup> If that 5.4 point partisan swing had been universal across all districts, the Democrats would have struggled to win control of the House and come nowhere near a 30-seat pick-up. Although it has been convenient for pre-election forecasters to think in terms of a national partisan swing with little variation across congressional districts, that is not the case. Partisan swing may typically vary somewhat across districts, as the importance of challenger quality, scandal, campaign spending, and incumbency status of the seat differentially affect races. But the 2006 election was not typical. In addition to these conventional factors, the salience of the Iraq war may have led to larger partisan swings in some districts.

We investigate what factors affected the amount of swing between 2004 and 2006 across House districts and to what degree the variation in swing was systematic as opposed to

idiosyncratic. In doing so we account for some variables that scholars have commonly included in the analysis of congressional elections, such as incumbent versus open seat, quality of challenger, and scandal. In addition, we examine the underlying partisan composition of the district and the salience of a key national issue. Aside from some normal expectations consistent with previous studies, we find that the swing was larger in Republican districts, in districts that were party competitive, and in districts where a key issue (the Iraq war) was most salient. Voters held individual Republican members of Congress accountable based on the local impact of Iraq war deaths in their congressional districts, and also held GOP members accountable based on their roll-call votes on the Iraq war. In contrast, voters did not reward or punish Democrats contingent upon their votes on the Iraq war or based on the number of district-level war deaths.

### **2006 House Elections: Expectations and Reality**

As the 2006 elections approached, many scholars and pundits hedged on whether the Democrats would win control of the House or the Senate. In the latter case, reservations focused on the fact that the Democrats were more exposed, holding 18 of the 33 seats to be contested, thus limiting the number of targets from which to make gains. In the House, however, attention focused on a perceived small number of potentially competitive seats. As Abramowitz (2006, 863) correctly noted in his article forecasting the midterm elections, only 12 of the Republicans elected in 2004 won with less than 55 percent of the two-party vote and only 16 represented districts that John Kerry carried in that election. Campbell (2006) was even more guarded in his expectations. His forecasting model accounted for the substantial decline in the number of competitive House seats in recent decades. Campbell contended that prediction models had to account for the fact that fewer seats were “in play” and observed how few seats were “marginal or closely fought” in the previous four national elections (Campbell 2006, 10).<sup>2</sup> To win control

of the House, the Democrats would not only have to hold nearly all of the seats they had going into the 2006 election, but they would also have to win GOP seats that were not competitive in 2004. Yet as the election neared, and despite the reservations, a consensus began to develop that the 2006 midterm elections would produce a national tidal wave favoring the Democrats and one sufficient to return the party to majority status in the House. President Bush's low job approval ratings, the increasing unpopularity of the Iraq war, the sizable margins in the generic congressional poll, and a series of scandals all pointed in the same direction (Bafumi, Erikson, and Wlezien 2006; Cook 2006; Rothenberg 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Comparing the 2004 and 2006 House elections at the district level, however, we were immediately struck by the unevenness of the so-called tidal wave election. Using the percentage of the two-party vote that the Democratic candidate received, in those seats with major party opposition in both 2004 and 2006 and where no redistricting occurred between the two elections, the swing between the two elections ranged from a low of -19.2 (Democratic loss of over 19 percentage points) to a high of 34.6 (Democratic gain of over 34 percent) with a mean of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 6.1.<sup>4</sup> As one might expect, the two extreme districts in terms of partisan swing were both open seats in 2006.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

But the unevenness of the swing is not just in the difference between incumbent-held seats and open seats. In Tables 1 and 2, we provide descriptive statistics for the 2006 partisan swing for each party's incumbents separately. In districts in which an incumbent ran for reelection in 2006, the swing range remained very sizable, running from -15.8 to 28.6 with a mean of 4.6 and a standard deviation of 5.4 for GOP incumbents and a mean of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 4.8 for Democratic incumbents.<sup>5</sup> Tables 1 and 2 also reveal that the

partisan swing is sizeable across districts, regardless of the underlying district partisanship. Overall, this suggests that generalizing about national partisan swing from a central tendency measure may camouflage substantial variation. We address whether the sources of that variation extend beyond the conventional, established ones.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

### **Explaining variation in the partisan swing: candidate and seat attributes**

The literature on congressional elections leads us to examine variables that might explain the differences in partisan swing across congressional districts. As alluded to above, we expect that incumbents of the president's party will insulate themselves better from the partisan swing than their parties' candidates in open seat contests. Although scholars disagree about the sources of incumbency advantage—use of perks of the office; Mayhew's (1974) triad of advertising, credit claiming, and position taking; casework and ombudsman service; or fundraising advantages linked to incumbency—and about whether it is as sizable now as it was from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, the combined effects discouraged strong challengers from entering and disadvantaged those who do run (e.g., Alford and Hibbing 1981; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Erikson 1971; Fiorina 1989; Herrnson 2003; Jacobson 2003; Oppenheimer 2005). Accordingly, we would expect the district's incumbency status to affect the amount of swing.

In an election year when the prospects are not favorable for a given party, Jacobson and Kernell (1983) would contend that strategic candidacies lead to a stronger than normal pool of challengers to that party's incumbents and a weaker than normal pool challenging the favored party's incumbents.<sup>6</sup> But that will impact contests selectively where quality challengers decide to run. For example, we expect a larger swing in a district where an incumbent Republican had a quality challenger in 2006 than in a similar district with no quality challenger (Jacobson 1989).

Also, candidate spending—and particularly opponent spending—has been shown to make congressional elections more competitive (Jacobson 2003).

Further, Fenno (1978) reminds us of the importance of qualification in building a trust relationship between a House member and her constituents and the dire implications when qualification is lost. This may occur when an incumbent is implicated in some personal or professional scandal (Abramowitz 1988; Jacobson and Dimock 1994). In 2006, general concerns related to corruption in government dogged mostly GOP members. However, the individual-level effects of scandals are exacerbated in those races where a candidate is directly implicated.

In sum, the existing literature on congressional elections provides support for some factors that may have resulted in variation in the amount of swing (incumbency, challenger quality, scandal, and challenger spending) across House contests between 2004 and 2006. We also think that the salience of an important national issue likely had an impact as well.

### **The Iraq war: anticipatory representation, responsible party government, and the swing**

We expect that the Iraq war also had an impact on differentials in the vote swing across districts. Our expectations regarding the war's effect emerge from two different (though not necessarily competing) theoretical perspectives on representation: (1) Mansbridge's (2003) theory of legislative anticipatory representation and (2) responsible party government.

Mansbridge (2003), following Arnold's (1990) insights, has argued that theoretical conceptions of representation in legislatures should move beyond what she terms "promissory representation," defined as legislators dyadically enacting policies based upon voters' expressed beliefs revealed in the previous campaign (see also Key's 1961 discussion of "latent opinion"). In her theory, and as an alternative to promissory representation, she contends that legislators engage in "anticipatory representation," where legislators anticipate future policy outcomes and

calculate the likely negative or positive consequences of these policies when casting votes in a legislature. In the theory of anticipatory representation, legislators are more concerned with voters' future reactions to roll-call decisions and resultant policy outcomes than they are with district-level opinion at the time roll calls are cast. Mansbridge posits that voters grant leeway to their members on any host of issues and roll calls in the short run, but will hold them accountable for outcomes of these decisions over the long run (also see Bianco 1994). Thus, this concept of anticipatory representation is similar to the idea of retrospective voting (Fiorina 1981).

Connecting this theoretical framework to the key national issue dominating the 2006 elections, the Iraq war, we expect that voters will punish those members most tied to the war's negative consequences. Given that the U.S. House initially approved the Iraq war in 2002, "future" policy outcomes based on that initial war vote can be measured in two ways: (1) voters in 2006 generally disapprove of the war regardless of the local salience of the war, and thus voters punish those legislators who voted for the 2002 war resolution; and (2) the past roll call can also yield a policy outcome with local consequences in 2006 (e.g., hometown Iraq war deaths), thus increasing the war's negative outcomes in specific districts. Therefore, in addition to voters punishing Republicans generally, we infer from Mansbridge's theory that individual legislators will be punished or rewarded in the 2006 election for both (1) their votes on the Iraq war held years earlier in 2002 and (2) for any collateral consequences (e.g. district-level war deaths) of this earlier vote. Further, the Iraq war was a highly charged issue during the 2006 campaign, thus making it an "easy" issue for voters to connect to legislators' past decisions (much like Carmines and Stimson 1980 argue that race was an easy, emotionally charged issue).

However, if the predictions of this theory of anticipatory representation are not demonstrated (and instead promissory or dyadic representation is used by legislators and voters)

then there is likely not to be a specific electoral effect tied to either fatal casualties or roll calls at the individual district level. In sum, the theoretical expectation based on Mansbridge (2003) and Arnold (1990) would be that legislators' past roll calls and/or higher deaths in specific districts (a policy outcome due to past roll calls) will be rewarded or punished at the polls.

Responsible party government offers an alternative, though not entirely competing, theoretical view to Mansbridge. Although anticipatory representation suggests an application to all legislators regardless of party, a "responsible party government" conception of accountability (APSA Report 1950) would suggest that voters will punish the party in power and not the minority party, regardless of the individual responsibility that each specific legislator holds. The responsible party government theory would argue that these individual legislator- and district-specific factors are unlikely to matter, and that Republican legislators will generally and across-the-board fare poorly regardless of the local salience of the war.

As a third alternative, we argue that merging the predictions of both the Mansbridge and responsible party government conceptions of representation will yield reasonable expectations for the effect of the Iraq war on the partisan swing in 2006. Combining a party government form of voter behavior with the theory of legislative anticipatory representation, we expect that (1) legislators who voted for the war will face negative electoral consequences; (2) legislators who represented districts with higher fatal casualties will also witness electoral punishments; *and* (3) the effects of (1) and (2) will be more pronounced among Republican legislators.

Although most work has focused on the effect of military events on public opinion (e.g., Berinsky and Druckman 2007; Boettcher and Cobb 2006; Gartner and Segura 1998; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/2006; Mueller 1973), existing research provides some support for and some doubts about whether to expect a relationship between variation in Iraq war salience and

the partisan swing across House districts. Karol and Miguel (2007) find a negative relationship between Iraq war casualties and the vote in states for President Bush in the 2004 election, controlling for other factors that predict the vote, and they wonder whether there are similar localized effects on the 2006 elections (27). And Gartner, Segura and Barratt (2004) find that higher numbers of Vietnam casualties reduced the electoral margins of senators from 1966-72, though this effect is “ameliorated when the incumbent opposes the war...”(467). Kriner and Shen (2007) also find that the number of Iraq war casualties negatively affected the vote share of incumbent Republican U.S. Senate candidates in 2006. But others might doubt that similar issue effects will be found in House campaigns. For example, Kahn and Kenney (2002) contend that issues and ideology have an effect in Senate campaigns but that House campaigns “simply do not provide enough information to citizens” for issues to have a similar effect (64). In part this is due to the fact that many House campaigns are not competitive, and issues do not receive emphasis in non-competitive campaigns. More importantly, from the perspective of our research, is their contention that the poor fit of media markets with House districts leads to sparse information available to voters about issues.

### **District partisanship and variations in the partisan swing**

In addition to the variables we have just discussed, other factors that have previously received little or no consideration may have contributed to the variability in partisan swing across districts in the 2006 House elections. First, we hypothesize that the underlying partisan competitiveness of the congressional district may have played a role. Incumbency advantage is not ubiquitous across all congressional districts (Erikson and Wright 1993). If incumbency advantage is operationalized as the ability of an incumbent to exceed the vote expectation for the district that would be predicted on the basis of underlying district partisan composition, then

existing analyses show that incumbents in competitive districts primarily earn incumbency advantage. Put simply, incumbents in competitive districts have strong incentives to exceed their expected vote given the underlying partisanship of their districts while those from very safe, one-party districts do not. Given that distinction, we expect that a midterm election with a strong national trend favoring one party will result in a district-level vote swing that will make members who rely heavily on incumbency advantage most vulnerable. As national partisan forces become more important in an election, those dependent on incumbency advantage will suffer the largest erosion of support as partisanship increasingly displaces the impact of incumbency as a voting cue. These tidal wave elections will yield “partisan corrections” to overvalued incumbents, much like a correction to the stock market will deflate overvalued stocks.

Second, we hypothesize that the amount of partisan swing in 2006 will differ in Democratic- and Republican-held districts. Hibbing and Alford (1981) find that, when the economy is weak, the negative effect on House incumbents of the president’s party exceeds any positive effect for out-party incumbents. In discussing why the impact of the economy is greater on incumbents of the in party, they contend: “When voters are motivated to ‘throw the bastards out’ or alternatively to ‘keep the good guys in,’ the referent is always an incumbent member of the in party” (431). Although their findings were part of an investigation of the impact of economic conditions and the state of the economy was neither strong enough or weak enough to play a major role in the 2006 elections, we expect that Hibbing and Alford’s findings extend to other salient factors for which voters may blame in-party candidates.<sup>7</sup> Thus, we hypothesize that the effect of general disaffection with the president will result in bigger negative swings in GOP districts than the positive swings in Democratic ones.<sup>8</sup>

### **Specification of the Empirical Models**

In total, we estimate eight multivariate models, four each for seats held by each party entering the 2006 election. We estimate separate party models because we anticipate that the effects of most key independent variables may differ across parties.<sup>9</sup> We exclude districts redistricted between the 2004 and 2006 elections, as the election results are not comparable.<sup>10</sup> We also exclude districts with no major party opposition in 2004 or in 2006.<sup>11</sup> The dependent variable in all models is the *Democratic vote share swing* from 2004 to 2006. It is measured as the 2006 Democratic House candidate two-party vote share minus the 2004 Democratic House candidate two-party vote share.<sup>12</sup> Negative values indicate a reduction in Democratic vote share in 2006, and positive values indicate an increase in Democratic vote share in 2006.

We include a number of independent variables to capture national-level and district-specific expected effects. In the descriptions below, we will discuss the expected direction of the effects for both Republican and Democratic members. Because the dependent variable in both Republican and Democratic models is the Democratic vote swing, the directional effect for all variables will be opposite for Democrats compared to Republicans unless we indicate otherwise. As we discuss more below, we estimate four models in each split-party sample due to concerns regarding multicollinearity across some key independent variables.

We include the *Bush 2004 two-party vote in district* to assess the effect of the underlying partisanship of the district and to determine whether this tidal wave election was a “partisan correction.” We expect marginal Republican districts (e.g., where Republican House members represent districts won by Kerry or where Bush carried the district narrowly) to have a larger swing, while Republican districts that are somewhat less marginal based on the underlying partisanship of the district should have a smaller vote share swing. For Democratic seats, the

theoretical relationship will be the same, though yielding a positive statistical relationship: very unsafe districts will have large vote share swings, and safer districts will have smaller swings.

We also include independent variables for the incumbency status of seats and the presence of quality challengers. *Incumbent* is coded 1 if the incumbent ran for reelection in 2006 and 0 if the seat was open. We expect this variable will be negative for Republicans, as incumbents will have less of a Democratic swing; but we expect this variable to be positive for Democrats, as incumbent Democrats will benefit from the national swing combined with advantages accrued due to incumbency. *Quality challenger* is coded similarly. We define quality challengers based on Jacobson's typology as candidates who run against incumbents that have previously held elected office.<sup>13</sup> This variable is coded 1 if there was a quality challenger running against an incumbent in 2006, and coded 0 if there was no quality challenger.<sup>14</sup> We expect this variable to be positive for Republican seats, and negative for Democratic seats.

A dummy variable *Scandal* is included, coded 1 if the candidate running was associated with a scandal in 2006 and coded 0 if not. We determine whether a candidate was involved in a scandal based on reporting in the *Hotline*. In November 2006, the *Hotline* identified a list of House candidates and districts involved in personal, financial, or other scandals and we used this list to construct the variable.<sup>15</sup> The variable *Opponent spending* is included to control for the effect of campaign spending on the swing (data for this variable are from *Politics in America*). This variable is measured as follows: the 2006 expenditures by the opponent minus the 2004 expenditures by the opponent. Thus, for the GOP models (as this variable measures the change in Democratic candidate spending between 2004 and 2006) we expect this variable to be positive. In the Democratic seat models, we expect this variable to be negative (as the measure is based on Republican candidate spending change).<sup>16</sup>

We employ several measures (1) to assess the effect of national issues (specifically the Iraq war) on the 2006 Democratic vote share swing; (2) to determine whether this prominent issue impacted all House members relatively equally or if this issue's effect was contingent upon district- or legislator-specific factors; and (3) to evaluate anticipatory representation expectations and responsible party expectations. They include measures of the Iraq war deaths in each congressional district, the roll-call vote of the representative in authorizing the war, and an interaction of the war deaths and the roll call, respectively.

In Model 1, we include the variable *Iraq war deaths in district (measure 1)*, which is measured as the number of soldiers killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom who were from the congressional district between January 1, 2006 and November 6, 2006.<sup>17</sup> To construct this variable, we consulted the list of fatal casualties reported by the Department of Defense, which includes the home town, referred to as the "home of record" of each American killed in Iraq. The "home of record" is not based on the location of the military base of the soldier, but is instead the soldier's listed home town prior to military service. The casualty database does not provide zip codes, but just city/town names. To compile the number of Iraq war deaths per district, we used all "home of record" cities in the casualties database; looked up all zip codes for these cities; and then using the *Congressional Staff Directory*, paired zip codes to congressional districts (the *Congressional Staff Directory* lists every zip code in a congressional district). If a city's set of zip codes overlapped multiple districts, each death was attributed to all congressional districts (e.g., zip codes for the "home of record" of New York, NY overlap four House districts; if there was one total death in the "home of record" of New York, NY, all four of these districts were coded as having one death). The mean number of Iraq war deaths per district based on this measure is just over 2, though there is quite a bit of variation across

districts. The minimum value is 0 deaths, and the maximum is 9 deaths. In Model 1, we use this first measure of Iraq war deaths.<sup>18</sup>

The results in Model 2 are based on an alternative measure of Iraq war deaths, *Iraq war deaths in district (measure 2)*. The only difference from the measure in Model 1 is in dealing with home of record-district overlaps. When the hometown's set of zip codes did not identify just one district, we divided by the number of congressional districts "claiming" the Operation Iraqi Freedom fatality. For instance, if there was one death in New York, NY, all four districts that overlap New York, NY were coded as having 0.25 deaths (1 death/4 districts = 0.25).

We also estimated two other models examining the effect of war deaths, legislators' roll calls on the decision to go to war in Iraq, and the interaction of these two variables. In model 3, we include *Iraq war deaths (measure 1)* and the additional variables below; in model 4, we include *Iraq war deaths (measure 2)* and the additional independent variables detailed below. The *Iraq war vote* is coded 1 if the member voted for H.J. Res. 114 to authorize war in Iraq, which was held on October 10, 2002. This variable is coded 0 if the member did not serve during October 10, 2002; abstained; or if the 2006 race in the district is an open seat (only one representative running in 2006, Solomon Ortiz, abstained). This variable is coded -1 if the member voted against H.J. Res. 114, and thus voted against the war in Iraq. On the Republican side, of those candidates running for reelection in 2006, only four Republican incumbents voted against the war while 153 voted for the war. However, seventy-five Republican seats had candidates (either incumbents or new candidates in formerly GOP open seats) that did not vote on H.J. Res. 114, primarily because they did not serve during that time period. The large number of seats held by Republicans in 2006 where the Republican incumbent or open seat candidate did not serve during the vote provides the key variation compared to legislators who served and

voted for the bill. If voters blamed individual members for the war, then those Republicans not serving and thus not voting for the Iraq war resolution will yield a smaller Democratic vote swing. On the Democratic side, quite a few members voted for the war, voted against the war, or were not serving in 2002: 103 Democratic incumbents running for reelection in 2006 voted against the war, 54 voted for the war, and 46 did not serve or abstained during the Iraq war vote.

If voters punish specifically those members that voted for the war, regardless of the legislator's party, then we should expect the effect of this vote variable to be positive for GOP seats and negative for Democratic seats. However, if voters punish only individual GOP members for their roll calls, then we should not find a relationship between the *Iraq war vote* variable in the Democratic seats models, but will expect a relationship between *Iraq war deaths in district* and the dependent variable in the GOP seats models. Further, we also include the interaction of *Iraq war vote* and *Iraq war deaths*, as voters may punish those who voted for the war contingent upon the number of Iraq war fatalities per district. This is in keeping with the Gartner, Segura, and Barratt (2004) findings that showed the effect of casualties in Vietnam on Senate elections was reduced if the senator opposed the war. Due to potential collinearity between the Iraq war deaths measures and the Iraq war vote base and interaction variables, we estimated models with and without the *Iraq war vote* and *Iraq war vote x Iraq war deaths* variables.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, we want to control for confounding variables related to districts with large military constituencies (Kriner and Shen 2007; Karol and Miguel 2007). The variable *Veterans in district* is the percentage of the district civilian population that are veterans. The variable *Armed forces population of district* is the percentage of the district population aged 18-64 in the armed forces. Both of these variables are based on 2000 census data. Kriner and Shen (2007)

argue that conventional wisdom suggests that military communities may be more likely to support the GOP in 2006, though alternatively also suggest that these communities “may have viewed the war and the administration’s military policies through a distinctly different and more critical lens....”

### **Results: Predicting the Democratic Swing**

Table 3 displays the results of the Republican-held seat models of the Democratic swing, while Table 4 shows the results of the Democratic-held seat models of the Democratic swing.<sup>20</sup> In Table 3, most variables in Models 1 and Models 2 are predictors of the partisan swing for Republicans. The presence of an incumbent, a scandal, opponent spending, the number of Iraq war deaths, and the percentage of veterans all have a statistically significant effect on the vote share swing for GOP incumbents (the veterans variable is positive and significant, consistent with the 2006 Senate election findings of Kriner and Shen 2007). Adding the *Iraq war vote* and the Iraq vote-deaths interaction variable in Models 3 and 4 in Table 3, all of the variables in the first two models remain significant, and the *Iraq war vote* variable is also significant. *Quality challenger* is insignificant, though this is likely because *Opponent spending* is correlated with the quality challenger measure: the strongest challengers are able to raise and spend large amounts.

In sum, these models’ findings indicate that voters were punishing Republicans contingent upon the local context of war deaths. Voters also punished those Republicans voting for the war in Iraq, though the level of statistical significance was not as great as other variables. Thus, a combination of an anticipatory representation explanation and a “responsible party government” explanation, contingent upon district- and member-specific factors pertaining to salience of the Iraq war as an issue, seems to be a component of understanding swing variation in

GOP House seats in 2006. As Iraq war deaths increased in congressional districts, the issue salience of the war increased thus magnifying its impact in Republican-held districts.

#### TABLE 3 AND FIGURES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE

To better visualize the relative impact of statistically significant election-specific factors, we have created figures of the predicted Democratic swing based on the results in Model 3, Table 3. Figure 1 displays the predicted swing for GOP seats only, while holding other variables constant. In Figure 1, the presence of an open seat in 2006 led to a predicted value of 10.4 percent for the seat's Democratic vote share change between 2004 and 2006.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, when GOP incumbents ran, the swing was less than half that size.<sup>22</sup>

Also shown in Figure 1 are the effects of a scandal and challenger spending, holding all else equal. The presence of a scandal clearly had an impact on GOP seats, resulting in a 4.0 percent larger Democratic vote share swing.<sup>23</sup> While the impact of scandal clearly had an impact, only 15 GOP seats were directly affected by scandal based on our measure. Also, those districts that had no increase in spending by the Democratic challenger in 2006 have predicted swings of only 4.6, which is less than the national swing of 5.4. In contrast, those districts with increases in the levels of Democratic spending from 2004 to 2006 had larger predicted swings.

To better assess the importance of the local context of Iraq war deaths we have displayed predicted values of the Democratic vote share swing in Republican-held districts in Figure 2.<sup>24</sup> We list the minimum, mean, maximum, and the values for one and two standard deviations above the mean for Republican incumbents who voted for the war, also indicating an actual member of Congress's district that takes on those values in the data. We also show the predicted value for an open seat with no deaths cross-referenced to an actual GOP open seat.<sup>25</sup> Holding all else equal, the impact of Iraq war deaths on Republican seats where the incumbent voted for the

war is not inconsequential. Going from 0 deaths in the district (which is 15% of the GOP districts analyzed in Table 3) to two standard deviations above the mean results in a change from a Democratic swing of 4.4 to 7.2 (an increase of nearly 3 percentage points). This value is nearly the same size as the impact (displayed in Figure 1) of a legislator being directly implicated in a scandal. Further, just glancing at the changes in the predicted vote swing for Republican incumbents in Figure 2, there is about a 1 percentage increase in the Democratic swing for every 2 deaths per district. Given that we are examining the swing between 2004 and 2006, and not a static measure of vote share in just 2006, this is a large effect. Looking at the size of the coefficients in Model 4, Table 3, this substantive effect of deaths is even larger (though the range of this second deaths variable is smaller than the first Iraq war deaths variable).

Also notable, the impact of the maximum number of deaths in an incumbent's district (9 deaths, which is how many deaths unsuccessful GOP incumbent J.D. Hayworth had in his Arizona district) leads to a prediction of 8.3. This is exactly the same predicted value as a district with an open seat with 0 deaths, suggesting that the incumbency advantage is clearly muted in those districts with large numbers of fatal casualties caused by the Iraq war.

Many of the factors that affected the magnitude of the swing in Republican-held districts played a weaker role in Democratic-held districts. Table 4 displays the models for the Democratic vote share swing in Democratic seats. Although the underlying partisanship of the district (as measured by the *Bush 2004 2-party vote*), *Incumbent*, *Scandal*, and *Opponent Spending* are all significant predictors of the Democratic vote swing in the expected directions, the *Quality challenger*, *Veterans*, and *Armed services population in district* variables are not statistically significant in any of the four Democratic seat models in Table 4.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Interestingly, none of the Iraq war variables affected the vote swing in Democratic House seats.<sup>26</sup> These insignificant results of the Iraq war variables in Table 4, tied with the significant impact of *Iraq war deaths* and the *Iraq war vote* in the GOP model in Table 3, clearly suggest that Republican legislators broadly were blamed for problems dealing with the Iraq war, but Democrats were not. These findings support a responsible party government model. Fifty-four Democrats running in 2006 voted for the war in Iraq, yet the Democratic vote share swing for these Democrats was no different than the swing for those Democrats voting against the war or those Democrats not present for the war vote. Our findings regarding the Iraq war variables in the Democratic and Republican models are consistent with Hibbing and Alford (1981) suggesting voters punish the in-party for poor economic conditions; however, we find that voters are punishing the in-party for the Iraq war.

### **Conclusion**

There are a number of theoretical and empirical implications of this analysis. The 2006 election for Congress was clearly a watershed election, and this sort of nationalized election can provide insights about congressional elections generally. We have long known that the president's party tends to fare poorly in "six-year itch" midterm elections. However, variation in how poorly the president's party performs has differed quite substantially in recent history (e.g., the Democrats in 1998 bucked historical trends; the Republicans in the House in 1986 lost only a few seats). As this research shows, partisan swing is far from uniform across congressional districts. It is affected by contest-specific variables and the local salience of national issues.

In 2006, George W. Bush's low approval led to larger swings in GOP-held districts than Democratic-held ones. In addition, a war in Iraq that had turned unpopular leading up to the 2006 election affected Republicans in districts with high numbers of war deaths and Republicans

who voted for the war. The national sense of scandal due to the Mark Foley page revelations, the Jack Abramoff scandal, and other scandals had a more pronounced effect in districts where a member was implicated.

The 2006 election yields insights and implications regarding the nature of incumbency advantage as well. In Republican seats, the size of the Democratic swing was much larger in open seats than when incumbents were running. Similarly, in Democratic seats, the Democratic swing was larger for incumbents than in open seats, all else equal. Thus, as we already know, the power of incumbency is important even in a national “tidal wave” election. However, the power of incumbency advantage is muted substantially for Republicans contingent upon a number of other factors, such as challenger spending. This suggests that pre-election analyses that assume that all districts are created equal when assessing the impact of the national swing locally need to consider district-specific factors when making pre-election forecasts.

Further, the power of incumbency advantage is muted substantially by the local context of national issues. In the 2006 election, the national issue of the Iraq war clearly affected a number of districts. Our analysis strongly suggests that voters blamed Republicans for the war, given the effects of war deaths and roll calls in our Republican models paired with our null results for the war variables in the Democratic models. Further, the local context of casualties can exacerbate problems of the party-in-power during an unpopular war. Although clearly a counterfactual scenario, one can infer from our analyses that had there been no Iraq war (and thus 0 deaths in each district), Republican incumbents would have performed much better.

A more realistic counterfactual would be a scenario where the Iraq war deaths were distributed evenly across districts. Given that the average number of war deaths in Republican districts was a relatively low 2.4 (low compared to those districts bearing the greatest number of

deaths), the concentration of military recruitment in certain districts and regions of the country made the electoral tidal wave bigger than might have been expected based on pre-election models. The swing percentage in a number of districts with large war deaths was the difference between a Republican or Democratic victory. For instance, all else equal, GOP incumbent J.D. Hayworth would not have lost his election had the number of deaths in his district reflected the national average instead of the actual value of 9 deaths in his district.

Of the 186 Republican seats analyzed in the empirical models, 80 had more fatal war casualties than the average for Republican seats, and 24 of these districts had 5 or more deaths each. By and large, these Republican-held districts with above-average deaths are rural or exurban and are districts that range from solid Republican to swing in terms of underlying partisanship. The GOP districts with a higher than average number of deaths were also frequently midwestern and western districts. This uneven distribution of U.S. soldier deaths across GOP districts resulted in uneven electoral consequences. We speculate that as the number of district war deaths increased, it made it easier for the Democratic candidate to make the war issue resonate with the electorate. Compared to previous U.S. conflicts, the number of war deaths per district is actually quite low. Perhaps surprisingly, these results suggest that American voters are extremely sensitive to a relatively small number of soldier deaths per district.

The results also suggest that members of the incumbent president's party serving during an unpopular war should be attuned to the potential for loss of electoral support as casualties mount. Further, these district-specific effects have implications for electoral effects in the wake of changing public opinion. Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2005/2006), examining aggregate public opinion, argue that the U.S. public will tolerate increasing casualties if a war is perceived as successful and justified (though see Berinsky and Druckman 2007). Our district-specific results

based on the Democratic vote swing suggest that if the aggregate public perception of the war shifts away from a perception of success and toward failure (as was the case leading up to the 2006 election), then this shift in opinion combined with casualties can have very specific electoral consequences in districts that may have previously supported the war. Many of these high-casualty Republican House seats are likely places that Bush initially relied upon to support the war. But as individual casualty numbers increased in those districts and the war's rationale began to deteriorate in the mind of the public generally, the resultant effect was surprisingly strong Democratic showings in many of these House districts. The district-level interaction between public opinion on the success of the war and casualties deserves greater inquiry. Future scholars should also consider whether war deaths may affect the 2008 congressional elections.

If deaths are too highly concentrated in certain regions, the national effects of an unpopular war will be exacerbated in districts bearing the greatest numbers of casualties. Critics, such as Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-NY), have noted the increased reliance of the military on more segmented populaces in the U.S. compared to wars generations ago, and these uneven military recruitment patterns have yielded electoral implications. Given that elections have policy consequences, foreign policy may be affected substantially due to the electoral consequences of war deaths differentially distributed across districts. This has major implications for the ability for the U.S. government to engage in prolonged wars.

Finally, the results suggest broader theoretical implications beyond the impact of war deaths. Voters clearly punish the party in power and also punish individual legislators within the party in power contingent upon the local context of the war and past roll calls. Anticipatory representation, which predicts that legislators will attempt to anticipate policy outcomes and that voters will reward and punish legislators based on their roll calls is demonstrated with GOP-held

seats. However, voters did not punish Democrats who voted for the war and there was no local impact of the war in Democratic districts, suggesting that the importance of anticipatory representation and retrospective voting is greater for the majority party.

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Table 1: Republican Incumbents in 2006 and the Democratic Two-party Vote Swing, Descriptive Statistics†

<i>District Partisan Performance in 2004 (Number of GOP incumbents in 2006 in each category)</i>	<i>Mean Democratic 2-party Vote Share Change, 2004 to 2006 (st. dev.)</i>	<i>Minimum Democratic 2-party Vote Share Change, 2004 to 2006 (name of incumbent)</i>	<i>Maximum Democratic 2-party Vote Share Change, 2004 to 2006 (name of incumbent)</i>
< 50% Bush 2-party vote in 2004 (n=15)	8.7 (5.8)	0.4 (Jim Gerlach, R, PA-6)	17.2 (Nancy Johnson, R, CT-5)
Bush 2-party vote 50-54.9% (n=35)	7.1 (5.0)	-0.3 (Jim Ramstad, R, MN-3)	19.2 (John Sweeney, R, NY-20)
Bush 2-party vote 55-59.9% (n=42)	2.9 (3.8)	-11.9 (Randy Forbes, R, VA-4)	9.2 (Dave Weldon, R, FL-15)
Bush 2-party vote 60-64.9% (n=41)	3.6 (6.1)	-15.8 (Charles Boustany, R, LA-7)	17.5 (Don Young, R, AK-1)
Bush 2-party vote 65-69.9% (n=23)	4.2 (4.9)	-7.2 (Louis Gohmert, R, TX-1)	14.8 (Mark Souder, R, IN-3)
Bush 2-party vote 70% and up (n=10)	2.7 (5.1)	-10.1 (Randy Neugebauer, R, TX-19)	8.0 (Jeff Miller, R, FL-1)
All GOP incumbents (n=166)	4.6 (5.4)	-15.8 (Charles Boustany, R, LA-7)	19.2 (John Sweeney, R, NY-20)
National Democratic swing (all voters)	5.4	-----	-----

†Note: This table includes only Republican incumbents running for reelection in 2006, excludes districts redistricted between 2004 and 2006, and excludes any incumbents who were unopposed or faced no major party opposition in either 2004 or 2006.

Table 2: Democratic Incumbents in 2006 and the Democratic Two-party Vote Swing, Descriptive Statistics†

<i>District Partisan Performance in 2004 (Number of Democratic incumbents in 2006 in each category)</i>	<i>Mean Democratic 2-party Vote Share Change, 2004 to 2006 (st. dev.)</i>	<i>Minimum Democratic 2-party Vote Share Change, 2004 to 2006 (name of incumbent)</i>	<i>Maximum Democratic 2-party Vote Share Change, 2004 to 2006 (name of incumbent)</i>
Bush 2-party vote $\geq$ 50% in 2004 (n=32)	3.9 (5.2)	-6.0 (John Spratt, D, SC-5)	16.4 (Stephanie Herseth, D, SD-AL)
Bush 2-party vote 45-49.9% (n=16)	5.2 (7.0)	-2.1 (James Oberstar, D, MN-8)	28.6 (Brian Higgins, D, NY-27)
Bush 2-party vote 40-44.9% (n=31)	3.1 (3.6)	-1.9 (Raul Grijalva, D, AZ-7)	13.4 (Russ Carnahan, D, MO-3)
Bush 2-party vote 35-39.9% (n=18)	0.9 (5.0)	-14.3 (Doris Matsui, D, CA-5)*	10.7 (Patrick Kennedy, D, RI-1)
Bush 2-party vote 30-34.9% (n=10)	1.6 (2.5)	-1.8 (Eliot Engel, D, NY-17)	7.3 (Sam Farr, D, CA-17)
Bush 2-party vote < 30% (n=22)	0.6 (3.0)	-9.9 (Bill Jefferson, D, LA-2)**	4.5 (Jerrold Nadler, D, NY-8)
All Democratic incumbents (n=129)	2.7 (4.8)	-14.3 (Doris Matsui, D, CA-5)*	28.6 (Brian Higgins, D, NY-27)
National Democratic swing (all voters)	5.4	-----	-----

†Note: This table includes only Democratic incumbents running for reelection in 2006, excludes districts redistricted between 2004 and 2006, and excludes any incumbents who were unopposed or faced no major party opposition in either 2004 or 2006.

\*Doris Matsui was first elected in a special election in 2005 to replace her deceased husband Robert Matsui. We subtract her 2006 vote from her 2005 special election vote to garner the Democratic 2-party vote share change.

\*\*Where there were not runoffs with a Republican versus a Democratic candidate, Louisiana's Democratic vote share change from 2004 to 2006 is calculated using the two-party vote based on the vote of the top-vote getting candidate and the highest vote-receiving candidate from the opposite party.

Table 3: Predicting the Democratic Swing, 2004 to 2006, Republicans Only<sup>†</sup>

<i>Dep. var.: Change between 2004 and 2006 Democratic two-party vote share in district (+ =increase; - = decrease)</i>				
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Coef. (robust s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef. (robust s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef. (robust s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef. (robust s.e.)</i>
Bush 2004 2-party vote in district	-0.007 (0.072)	-0.004 (0.070)	-0.004 (0.073)	-0.001 (0.071)
Incumbent	-4.396 (2.007)**	-4.282 (1.983)**	-5.409 (2.106)***	-5.376 (2.071)***
Quality challenger	0.919 (1.020)	0.820 (1.030)	1.065 (1.018)	0.969 (1.025)
Scandal	4.065 (1.627)***	3.947 (1.620)***	3.977 (1.621)***	3.855 (1.609)***
Opponent spending (in 100,000s)	0.261 (0.061)***	0.270 (0.064)***	0.249 (0.059)***	0.257 (0.062)***
Iraq war deaths in district (measure 1)	0.507 (0.163)***	-----	0.574 (0.277)**	-----
Iraq war deaths in district (measure 2)	-----	0.879 (0.297)***	-----	1.044 (0.497)**
Iraq war vote (-1=no; 0=no vote; 1=yes)	-----	-----	1.557 (1.115)*	1.796 (1.113)*
Iraq war deaths in district x Iraq war vote	-----	-----	-0.146 (0.354)	-0.308 (0.605)
Veterans in district	0.363 (0.176)**	0.319 (0.181)*	0.382 (0.173)**	0.345 (0.176)*
Armed forces population of district	-0.276 (0.219)	-0.270 (0.208)	-0.296 (0.214)	-0.298 (0.204)
Constant	2.393 (4.685)	2.579 (4.795)	2.027 (4.747)	1.991 (4.889)
F (8, 177)	15.19***	14.54***		
F (10, 175)			13.01***	13.08***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.42	0.43	0.43	0.44
N	186	186	186	186

<sup>†</sup>All regressions are estimated with robust standard errors. All models include only Republican seats, exclude districts redistricted between 2004 and 2006, and exclude any seats where candidates were unopposed or faced no major party opposition in either 2004 or 2006.

\*p<sub>≤</sub>0.10; \*\*p<sub>≤</sub>0.05; \*\*\*p<sub>≤</sub>0.01 (all one-tailed tests, except veterans variable, armed forces variable, and interaction variable in models 3 and 4).

Table 4: Predicting the Democratic Swing, 2004 to 2006, Democrats Only<sup>†</sup>

<i>Dep. var.: Change between 2004 and 2006 Democratic two-party vote share in district (+ = increase; - = decrease)</i>				
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Coef. (robust s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef. (robust s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef. (robust s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef. (robust s.e.)</i>
Bush 2004 2-party vote in district	0.117 (0.029)*	0.125 (0.032)*	0.108 (0.029)*	0.115 (0.031)*
Incumbent	5.401 (2.163)*	5.258 (2.032)*	5.471 (2.178)*	5.352 (2.038)*
Quality challenger	0.193 (1.070)	0.057 (1.104)	0.268 (1.092)	0.140 (1.129)
Scandal	-7.140 (1.829)*	-6.775 (1.832)*	-7.063 (1.943)*	-6.681 (1.823)*
Opponent Spending (in 100,000s)	-0.361 (0.096)*	-0.359 (0.098)*	-0.361 (0.098)*	-0.360 (0.100)*
Iraq war deaths in district (measure 1)	-0.015 (0.154)	-----	-0.040 (0.162)	-----
Iraq war deaths in district (measure 2)	-----	-0.287 (0.384)	-----	-0.320 (0.393)
Iraq war vote (-1=no; 0=no vote; 1=yes)	-----	-----	0.518 (0.523)	0.596 (0.510)
Iraq war deaths in district x Iraq war vote	-----	-----	-0.157 (0.151)	-0.320 (0.257)
Veterans in district	-0.114 (0.114)	-0.105 (0.113)	-0.099 (0.115)	-0.096 (0.115)
Armed forces population of district	-0.000 (0.236)	0.043 (0.263)	0.046 (0.254)	0.099 (0.280)
Constant	-6.522 (2.294)*	-6.461 (2.202)*	-6.329 (2.302)*	-6.182 (2.188)*
F (8, 128)	10.40*	12.01*		
F (10, 126)			8.07*	9.89*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.42	0.43	0.43	0.43
N	137	137	137	137

<sup>†</sup>All regressions are estimated with robust standard errors. All models include only Democratic seats, exclude districts redistricted between 2004 and 2006, and exclude any seats where candidates were unopposed or faced no major party opposition in either 2004 or 2006.

\*  $p \leq 0.01$  (all one-tailed tests, except veterans variable, armed forces variable, and interaction variable in models 3 and 4).

Figure 1: Predicted Values of Democratic Swing Percentage, by Election-specific Factors, Republican Seats Only (based on Model 3, Table 3)

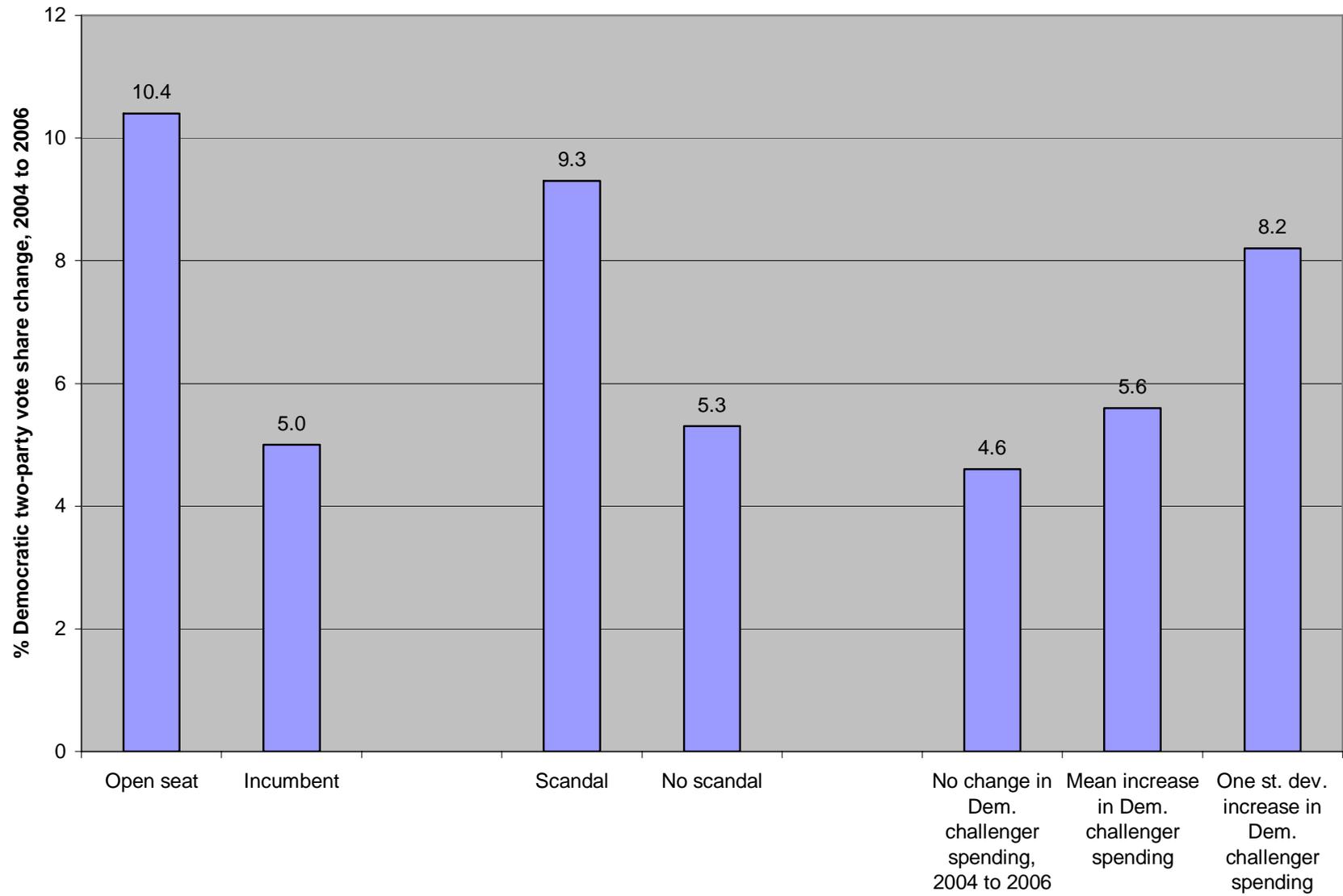
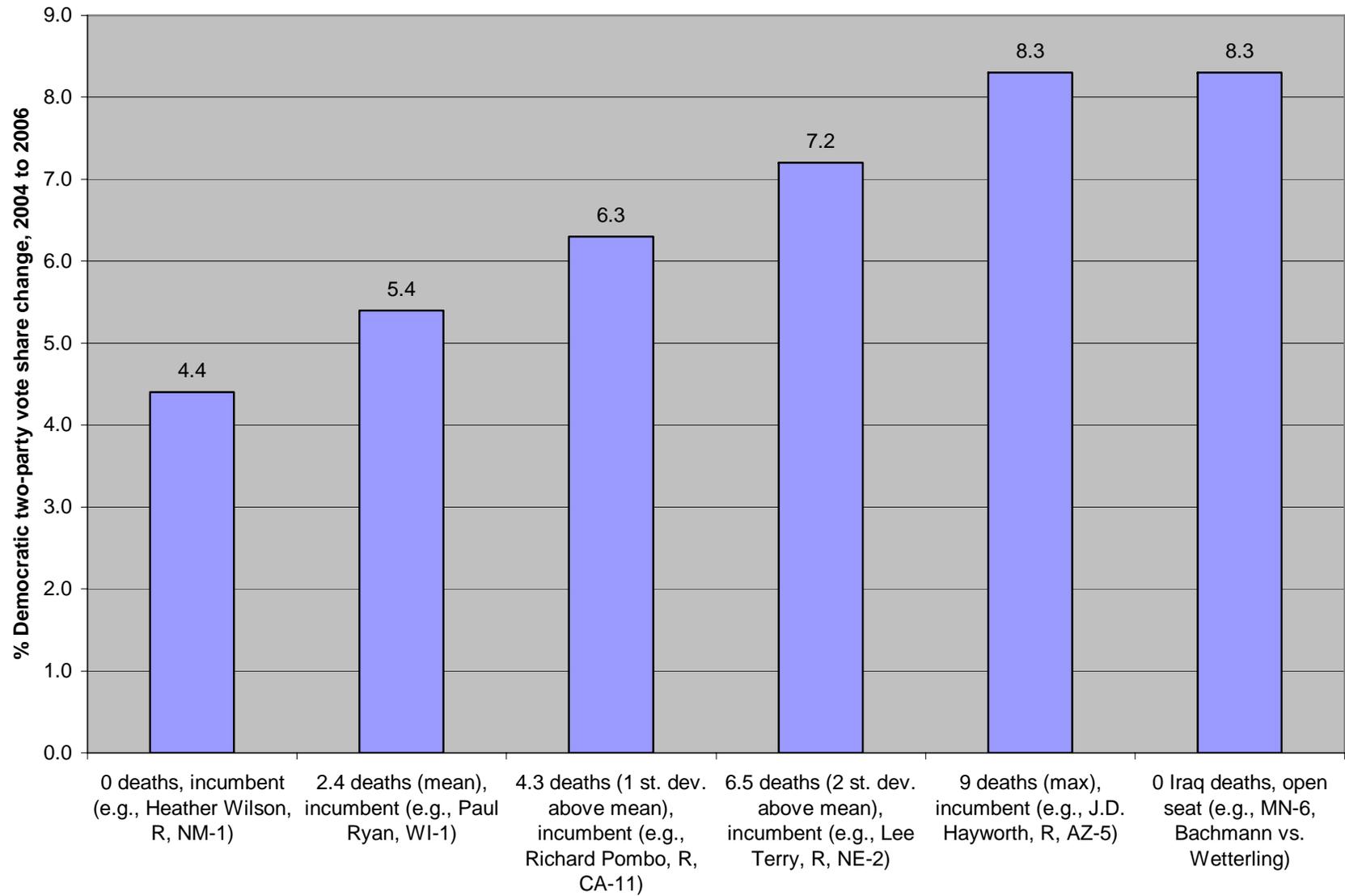


Figure 2: Predicted Values of Democratic Swing Percentage, by Number of Iraq War Fatalities in District, Republican Seats Only (based on Model 3, Table 3)



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<sup>1</sup> The Clerk of the House was the source for the 2004 figures, and Alan Abramowitz provided the 2006 figures.

<sup>2</sup> Abramowitz's model did nevertheless predict a Democratic seat gain sufficient to win control of the House while Campbell projected a seat gain that would leave the Democrats just short.

<sup>3</sup> According to the archive of presidential approval polls at the Roper Center for Public Opinion, Bush's approval rating hovered in the mid-30s to low-40s in the latter half of 2006 leading up to the November 7, 2006 election. The November polls taken right before Election Day showed Bush with an approval rating ranging from 35% (*Newsweek* poll, 11/2-11/3/2006) to 41% (Pew, 11/1-11/4/06). In the same Pew poll taken right before Election Day, 56% said the decision to invade Iraq was a mistake, disapproval of Congress was at 70%, and the Democrats beat the Republicans in the generic congressional poll 51-44%.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the mean swing of 4.2 is considerably less than the estimated swing in the national vote for the House between 2004 and 2006. At least two factors may account for this difference. First, there is considerable variation in the number of votes cast in House districts; some districts, even in the same state, cast more than twice the votes as in other districts. The mean swing per district treats all districts equally regardless of the number of votes that were cast in each, whereas districts that cast more votes have a greater impact on partisan swing as measured by the national vote for the House. Second, the national vote for the House includes votes cast for candidates without major party opposition.

<sup>5</sup> Again, these data and the data reported in Table 1 and Table 2 are based on all districts with major party opposition in 2004 and 2006 and that were not redistricted between 2004 and 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Hetherington, Globetti, and Larson (2003) also find that a perception of electoral vulnerability can lead to the strategic emergence of quality challengers.

<sup>7</sup> We use Hibbing and Alford's finding regarding the economy and extend it to the most relevant national issue with district-level consequences in 2006 (the Iraq war). Ideally, we could also include an examination of district-level economic change as well. However, there are no reliable measures of economic change at the House district level. Further, the economy, arguably, did not change dramatically between 2004 and 2006 in most districts—and it was not a major issue in the 2006 elections.

<sup>8</sup> Unlike Hibbing and Alford, we believe that unlike the health of the economy, where in-party candidates in open seat contests are not held as accountable as in-party incumbents, Republican candidates in both types of contests will be negatively impacted by the low Bush approval rating.

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<sup>9</sup> We also estimated the equations with both Democratic and Republican seats together with the specifications detailed below, though also including a dummy independent variable for political party of the legislator. The results of these alternative models are not presented, though the results are substantively similar to the split-sample results presented in the manuscript. The party coefficient (coded 1 for Democrats, 0 for Republicans) was significant, and Republican seats were more likely to have a greater Democratic swing.

<sup>10</sup> The redrawn districts that were excluded from the analyses are as follows: GA-1 through GA-13; TX-15; TX-21, TX-23, TX-25, TX-28.

<sup>11</sup> We also estimated the results on all non-redistricted districts, including districts with candidates facing no opposition or no major party opposition and including an additional independent variable for unopposed seats. The results were substantively similar to the ones presented here.

<sup>12</sup> For those incumbents running in 2006 initially elected in a special election to the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress held prior to November 2006, we use their initial special election vote shares compared to their 2006 vote shares. The results presented later were substantively the same if we instead used the 2006 Democratic vote shares and the 2004 Democratic vote shares of the previous officeholders.

<sup>13</sup> We only code quality challengers running against an incumbent, and not quality candidates in open seats. We are grateful to Gary Jacobson for sharing this data.

<sup>14</sup> We also alternatively estimated the models including two different variable measures in place of the *Incumbent* and *Quality challenger* variables. A variable measuring the change in incumbency seat status between 2004 and 2006 was included (coded -1 if an incumbent ran in 2004, though the seat was open in 2006; coded 0 if there was no change in the seat's status between 2004 and 2006; and coded 1 if there was an open seat in 2004, though an incumbent ran in 2006). A variable measuring the change in quality challenger status between 2004 and 2006 was also included (coded -1 if there was a quality challenger running against an incumbent in 2004, and a non-quality challenger in 2006; coded 0 if there is no change from 2004 to 2006, which could mean that a quality challenger ran against an incumbent in both 2004 or 2006 or if there was no quality challenger in either 2004 or 2006; and coded 1 if there was no quality challenger running against an incumbent in 2004, but there was a quality challenger running against an incumbent in 2006). Results were similar to those presented. We present the dummy variables based on 2006 seat status and quality challenger presence as they are more parsimonious and because the 2004 quality challenger data were coded based on descriptions in *CQ's Politics in America*, which may miss some quality challengers if the description in each district entry does not dwell on the past election (and the 2006 quality challenger data, provided by Gary Jacobson, are more exhaustive).

<sup>15</sup> The *Hotline* identified 17 scandal-affected districts: Richard Renzi (AZ-1); John Doolittle (CA-4); Richard Pombo (CA-11); Jerry Lewis (CA-41); Mark Foley/Joe Negron (FL-16); Dennis Hastert (FL-14); John Shimkus (IL-19); William Jefferson (LA-2); John Sweeney (NY-

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20); Thomas Reynolds (NY-26); Charles Taylor (NC-11); Deborah Pryce (OH-15); Joy Padgett (OH-18); Curt Weldon (PA-7); Don Sherwood (PA-10); Shelley Sekula Gibbs (TX-22); and Alan Mollohan (WV-1).

<sup>16</sup> We use this measure as challenger spending has most frequently been shown to linearly affect congressional vote shares. Also, we estimated the model without this variable, as challenger spending is in part a proxy for many of the other variables already specified (e.g. quality challenger). When the *Opponent spending* variable is excluded, the results are generally the same, except that the quality challenger variable is significant in the alternative specifications.

<sup>17</sup> We chose to examine all deaths in the calendar year of the 2006 election leading up until the day before Election Day (Election Day was November 7, 2006). Alternative specifications extended over longer periods of time (January 1, 2005 to November 6, 2006) and over shorter time periods (June 1, 2006 to November 6, 2006) yielded substantively similar results to those presented in the text. However, we prefer the casualty measure encompassing the 2006 year leading up to the election, as it is long enough to yield variation on the independent variable, yet short enough that the deaths are likely to be remembered and considered by the voters.

<sup>18</sup> While the variable specifically measures the total number of district-level casualties, we do not necessarily assume that most voters know the precise number of deaths in a district. This variable is a proxy for “bad news” regarding casualties in the district. For instance, voters in those districts with 0 deaths (15% of the Republican seats analyzed) or few casualties will be much less likely to perceive localized negative policy outcomes of the war compared to voters living in districts with larger numbers of deaths. Larger numbers of local casualties will be a cue or information shortcut that the war is not going well, as there will be more local media coverage and one-on-one interpersonal communications in the district about war casualties when casualties are more frequent.

<sup>19</sup> Estimating the models with the *Iraq war deaths* variable and the *Iraq war vote* variable—but without the interaction term—yielded substantively similar results to those presented later.

<sup>20</sup> By “held” we mean the party holding the seat going into the 2006 election.

<sup>21</sup> These predicted values were calculated by varying the value of the *Incumbent* variable, while holding all other variables at their means.

<sup>22</sup> There is clearly evidence of incumbency advantage among GOP seats. However, because we hold other factors constant, we may be overestimating the incumbency advantage. Many (though not all) Republican incumbents were present and voted for the war in Iraq, while open seat candidates do not cast roll calls. A GOP incumbent’s vote for the war would make the Democratic swing even larger for incumbents than the 5.0 prediction displayed in Figure 1.

<sup>23</sup> The scandal predicted values were calculated by varying the value of the *Scandal* variable, while holding all other variables at their means. The challenger spending predicted values were calculated by varying the *Opponent spending* variable and holding all other variables equal.

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<sup>24</sup> These predictions are based on the equation in Model 3 of Table 3, holding all variables constant at their means except for the *Iraq war deaths in district*, *Iraq war vote*, *Iraq war deaths x Iraq war vote*, and the *Incumbent* variables. For incumbents, we held the *Incumbent* variable equal to 1; we held the *Iraq war vote* variable equal to 1; we varied the *Iraq war deaths* variable across a variety of values of interest; and we specified the *Iraq war deaths x Iraq war vote* variable to match our values for the base variables (the Iraq war vote component of the interaction variable was held at 1, while the Iraq war deaths component value of the interaction variable was specified at the value of interest for the *Iraq war deaths* variable). For the open seat district with 0 deaths shown in Figure 2, we held the *Incumbent* variable equal to 0; we held the *Iraq war vote* variable equal to 0; we held the *Iraq war deaths* variable at 0; and thus the *Iraq war deaths x Iraq war vote* variable was also held at 0 given the values for the two base variables (0 Iraq war deaths x 0 Iraq war vote value = 0).

<sup>25</sup> In Figure 2, for instance, we list Paul Ryan (R, WI-1) as an example of a legislator with a district with the mean number of deaths. The *Iraq war deaths (measure 1)* variable takes integer values, so these examples are based on the summary statistic nearest to district's actual value (e.g., Ryan's district had 2 deaths, not 2.4).

<sup>26</sup> Unlike with the GOP models, we do not present the predicted values for the swing for Democratic seats as fewer variables were statistically significant (such as the Iraq war variables).