

# Extension of Remarks

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## The 2006 House Elections: Forecasts and Results

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As most forecasts made with formal models anticipated, last year's mid-term elections resulted in the Democrats regaining control of the U.S. House of Representatives. This put an end to twelve years of continuous Republican dominion of that chamber (see Figure 1).

Prior to 2006, models for forecasting the outcome of House elections had not been particularly successful (Jones and Cuzán 2006). In 2002, when the Republicans added to their majority, three forecasts wrongly predicted a turnover in favor of the Democrats (Abramowitz 2002, Erikson and Bafumi 2002, Lewis-Beck and Tien 2002).

But as shown in Table 1, this time four of the six statistical models correctly predicted that the Democrats would retake the House. The mean absolute error was 9-10 seats (depending on which Abramowitz's forecast is used—see notes #4 and #6), or about half the average incurred by nine models appearing between 1974 and 2002 (Jones and Cuzán 2006).

Comparing the models, all but one (the exception being Cuzán & Bundrick's) incorporated at least one measure of public opinion, be it presidential approval rating (those of Abramowitz, Brandt & Brunell, and Campbell) or the generic party ballot (Bafumi, Erikson & Wlezien's) or both (Klarner & Buchanan's). Three included one or more economic predictors (those of Brandt & Brunell, Cuzán & Bundrick, and Klarner & Buchanan) and two a measure of candidate quality (Abramowitz's and Klarner & Buchanan's). Also, three models used simulations to generate a probability distribution of outcomes (those of Bafumi, Erikson & Wlezien, Brandt & Brunell, and Klarner & Buchanan). Interestingly, the three models with the most accurate forecasts (Abramowitz's, Bafumi, Erikson & Wlezien's, and Klarner & Buchanan's) are distinguished by having incorporated both district-level (open seats, candidate quality, percent voting for Kerry in 2004) and national-level variables (presidential approval rating or the generic ballot). Only one of the other three models (Campbell's) did so (percent of marginal seats).

In sum, 2006 was a good year for mid-term elections forecasting. Perhaps a corner has been turned and the performance of House elections models will become comparable to that attained by those used in presidential elections forecasting.

It was also a good year for the Democrats. Not only did they regain control of the House (and Senate), they did so without yielding a single seat. All party turnovers occurred in districts (or states, in the case of the Senate) in Republican hands. However, the Democrats' 30-seat gain in the House was average for a midterm election. Compared to previous off-year elections which led to the president's party actually losing control (1918, 1930, 1946, 1954 and 1994), their victory was even less impressive. In those five instances, the average incumbent loss was 40 seats, which amounted to 16% of their congressional representation. By contrast, last year the Republicans saw their membership shrink by 13%. Ironically, in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Democrats will control 232 seats and the Republicans 202, which is exactly the reverse of the party division in the previous Congress. (Additionally, as they did before the election, the Democrats can count on another vote from the lone seat occupied by an Independent, Bernard "Bernie" Sanders of Vermont.)

The 2006 results suggest that the Democrats' victory does not augur a return to the kind of hegemony they enjoyed in the four decades that ended with the 1994 election (see Figure 1). It is more likely that the system is in for a repeat of the pattern exhibited between 1910 and 1954, during which the parties took turns at controlling the House from one to eight terms, the average tenure lasting four terms.

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**Table 1. Forecasts for Republican Seat Losses<sup>1</sup> in the 2006 Elections for the U. S. House of Representatives**

Author	N <sup>2</sup>	Forecast range <sup>3</sup>	Forecast point <sup>3</sup>	Absolute Error
Abramowitz <sup>4</sup>	28	22-28	25*	5
Abramowitz <sup>4</sup>	28		29*	1
Bafumi, Erikson & Wlezien	15		32*	2
Brandt & Brunell	30	6-19	12	18
Campbell	14-30	10-16	13	17
Cuzán & Bundrick	46	16-25	20*	10
Klarner & Buchanan <sup>5</sup>	16	14-31	22*	8
Mean Absolute Error <sup>6</sup>				9-10

<sup>1</sup> The Republicans won 232 seats in 2004 and 202 in 2006, resulting in a 30-seat loss.

<sup>2</sup> N is the number of historical elections on which the model was based, although three (those of Bafumi, Erikson & Wlezien, Brandt & Brunell, and Klarner & Buchanan) simulated additional “elections.”

<sup>3</sup> The range refers to the lowest and the highest forecast obtained with alternative specifications or different models estimated by the authors. The forecast point was either specified by the authors or calculated as the midpoint of the range.

<sup>4</sup> There are two forecast for Abramowitz, one cited in the references and the other unpublished but included in Polly’s Updates at [politicalforecasting.com](http://politicalforecasting.com). The source for the latter is personal electronic communication, dated October 13, 2006. Based on “information about challenger quality from Gary Jacobson,” Abramowitz’s revised his forecast as follows: “The new prediction, based on previous Republican seat % of 53.5, midterm dummy variable of +1 (GOP presidential midterm), net presidential approval in first September Gallup Poll of -17, generic ballot margin in first September Gallup Poll of -12 (based on registered voters), 2% Democratic advantage in open seats and 3% Democratic advantage in challenger quality is a Democratic gain of 29 seats in the House.”

<sup>5</sup> Winner of the 2006 Pollyprize Competition sponsored by the International Institute of Forecasters. See [politicalforecasting.com](http://politicalforecasting.com).

<sup>6</sup> The mean forecast error varies slightly depending on which of the two of Abramowitz’s forecasts is used. See note #4.

\* Forecast correctly called for a turnover in the House of Representatives in favor of the Democrats.

Sources: See references for the authors’ 2006 publications or papers. But see note #4 on Abramowitz’s second, revised forecast.

Figure 1. Post-Election Distribution of Seats in the U.S. House of Representatives by Party, 1914-2006

