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## The President's Party At The Midterm: An Aggregate And Individual-level Analysis Of Seat Loss And Vote Choice In U.S. House Elections

David Macdonald  
*University of Central Florida*



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THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY AT THE MIDTERM: AN AGGREGATE AND INDIVIDUAL-  
LEVEL ANALYSIS OF SEAT LOSS AND VOTE CHOICE IN U.S. HOUSE ELECTIONS

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2011

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Political Science  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term  
2013

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of midterm U.S. House elections using a multi-level research design. At the aggregate-level, multiple regression analysis is used to examine the variables that affect seat loss for the president's party. This integrates, updates and extends the extant literature of the topic, and offers a means of explaining and predicting seat losses by the president's party in the U.S. House. To further probe the findings at the aggregate-level, the thesis develops a pooled cross-sectional model of individual-level vote choice in midterm U.S. House elections using data from the American National Election Studies (1982-2002) and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study for the 2006 and 2010 midterm elections. Findings suggest that variables measuring the performance of the economy and realignment of the South toward the Republican Party affect seat loss at the aggregate level. However, at the individual level, economic evaluations exerted little influence on vote choice, above and beyond party identification, although perceptions of the national economy did appear to influence vote choice in the 2006 and 2010 elections. Future research might incorporate the strategic politician thesis into the explanatory scheme and move the analysis to elections for other political offices, such as U.S. Senate elections as well as state legislative and gubernatorial elections.

I would like to dedicate this to my parents and my friends. Because of you, my six years at UCF were truly special. I would not be where I am today without you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to convey my appreciation and gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Jonathan Knuckey, for his guidance, advice, and assistance in writing this thesis. I always felt as though my success and the success of every graduate student were personally important to him. I would not only like to thank Dr. Knuckey for his guidance in writing this thesis and spurring my interest in empirical political research, but also for his interest in my academic and personal success.

I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Drew Lanier and Dr. Nathan Ilderton. Dr. Ilderton, thank you for your willingness to offer constructive feedback and guidance on an area of your expertise. To Dr. Lanier, I would like to thank you for always challenging and pushing me to my limits, from the first class in your American Politics seminar until the day of my thesis defense. I sincerely believe it prepared me well for success at UCF and in future academic endeavors.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there have been 28 national midterm elections. The president's party has gained seats in only four of them. The election of 1902 could be discounted as the United States House of Representatives actually expanded in size from 357 to 386 seats. Teddy Roosevelt's Republican Party gained seven seats while the opposition Democrats gained 25 seats (Busch 1999: 15). In 1934, 1998, and 2002, the president's party registered seat gains in the single digits.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1946, the first post-World War II midterm election, and the first for which Gallup data measuring presidential approval became available, the president's party has lost an average of 28 House seats. That number increased to 36 when the president's approval rating dipped below 50% (Gallup 2013). Some midterm elections have been particularly devastating. In 1946, Harry Truman's Democratic Party was routed in the House, losing 54 seats and the majority. The Democrats regained the majority two years later and would hold it for 40 consecutive years from 1955 to 1995. This, however, did not prevent a predictable pattern from occurring. In every one of the 10 midterm elections during the Democratic Party's 40 year reign as the House majority, the president's party lost seats. This held true for both Democratic and Republican presidents. Competing theories at both the aggregate-and individual-levels have been offered as to why the president's party so frequently endures setbacks at the midterm.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1934, during Franklin Roosevelt's first term, the Democrats gained U.S. House of Representatives. In 1998, during Bill Clinton's second term, the Democrats gained five seats. Republican George W. Bush saw his party keep their House majority, gaining eight seats as a result of the 2002 midterms. All data regarding party changes in House midterms was gathered from the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives (2013).

This research seeks to provide a comprehensive study of midterm elections through quantitative analyses of the variables that affect seat loss for the president's party at the aggregate level and vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives at the individual level. At the aggregate level, this research seeks to update and supplement the aggregate model of midterm seat loss posited by Campbell (1985). The individual-level analysis tests the effect of economic evaluations in a pooling of midterm elections utilizing data from the ANES cumulative file, and also compares the influences of presidential popularity and economic evaluations on vote choice in the 2006 and 2010 midterm elections through analyses of Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) data.

#### Direction of the Aggregate-Level Study

Surge and decline (Campbell 1960) and referendum (Tufte 1975) are two of the most prominent aggregate-level theories seeking to explain midterm seat loss. The former attributes midterm losses to the events of the prior presidential election, while the latter focuses on conditions at the time of the midterm. The strategic politician thesis (Jacobson and Kernell 1983) has also been advanced as an explanation for midterm losses by the presidential party. This theory argues that quality candidates will forgo running for political office in an unfavorable electoral environment. In other words, strong candidates of the president's party will not run for political office if the economy is in recession or the president is unpopular. In contrast, the opposition party, enjoying a favorable electoral environment, will field stronger candidates than will the president's party. This will hinder the president's party at the midterm, thus leading to seat losses in the U.S. House of Representatives.

There are three main research questions this research attempts to address at the aggregate level. The first is whether Campbell's (1985) combined model of midterm seat loss in the House of Representatives remains accurate when updated through 2010.<sup>2</sup> The second relates to the effect of the economy. The third question is how other variables found in the midterm literature can affect midterm seat loss. These variables are: exposure (measured by whether a party holds more or less House seats than average) (Oppenheimer, Stimson, and Waterman 1986), the political party of the president (Coleman 1997), the number of uncontested House races (Wrighton and Squire 1997), the presence or absence of divided government, and the consequences of the South's political realignment (Black and Black 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> Multiple attempts were made to replicate this model multiple times and made every reasonable effort was made to seek assistance. Even when inputting the same data from the same time period, 1946-1982, the regression model generated by SPSS was not the same as Campbell's. Despite this, the coefficients are all of similar magnitudes, in the same direction, and are statistically significant at the same levels. As previously mentioned, pure replication is not the main goal of this aggregate-level research. Despite the differences in regression models, this model and the variables it employs can still be useful in predicting seat loss. The main objective is to update a model of midterm loss that combines surge and decline with referendum. Updating his combined model through 2010 is one way of accomplishing this.

Table 1: Campbell's (1985) Models of Midterm Seat Loss: 1946-1982

Model	Independent Variables	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Coattails/Surge and Decline	Prior presidential vote	.37
Economy/Popularity	Presidential popularity, Economy	.55
Combined (will be updated and supplemented)	Prior presidential vote, Presidential popularity, Economy	.82
Reduced	Prior presidential vote, Presidential popularity	.82
Integrated	Prior presidential vote, Presidential popularity, Midterm counter variable	.88

Campbell's original combined model, tested across the 10 midterm elections from 1946 through 1982, found the effect of the economy statistically insignificant when tested along with prior presidential vote and presidential popularity at the midterm. He finds further support for this when updated through the 1994 elections (Campbell 1997b, 124). However, his findings relating to the influence of the economy contradict much of the literature. Indeed Campbell himself (1991) found a weakening of surge and decline from 1868 through 1988. If the effect of surge and decline is weakening, the explanatory power and effects of presidential popularity and the economy on seat loss could increase. While not disagreeing with his methodology, this aggregate-level research attempts to refute his claims regarding the economy's effect (or lack thereof) on midterm seat loss. This is the main justification for updating this model of midterm seat loss.

### Direction of the Individual-Level Study

Negative voting (Kernell 1977) is among the most prominent individual-level theories of midterm losses. This theory argues that voters with a negative view of the president's job performance will be less likely to support a congressional candidate of the president's party. This effect holds even when controlling for party identification. It also finds that individuals holding negative views of the president will be more likely to vote in U.S. midterm elections than will individuals who approve of the president's job performance. Cover (1986) failed to confirm this finding, but his analysis did support the idea that negative presidential evaluations are more powerful than positive ones in affecting congressional vote choice.

The other main variables of interest at the individual level are economic evaluations, party identification, the presence of an open seat U.S. House race, and a voter's familiarity with the U.S. House candidates.<sup>3</sup> The effects of these variables on congressional elections are often studied separately. Furthermore, testing of these variables is almost always conducted in a single election or over a limited series of single elections. Again, the main gap that this individual-level analysis fills is by testing economic voting in a pooled analysis of midterm elections employing data from the ANES cumulative file from 1982 through 2002.

In addition, through testing the 2006 and 2010 elections using Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (CCES) data, this research updates the midterm literature as these two elections have received comparatively less empirical testing. These analyses will not incorporate contextual factors, such as public opinion on the Iraq War (Jacobson 2007), the consequences of

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately the 2006 and 2010 CCES did not ask questions regarding individuals' retrospective egotropic evaluations. It also did not ask questions regarding their prospective sociotropic nor prospective egotropic economic evaluations.

the Affordable Care Act (Brady et. al 2011), or the rise of the Tea Party (Aldrich et. al 2012). That is not to discount their impact on voting behavior. This analysis simply presents a more generalizable model of vote choice. In addition, the effect of the Iraq War on vote choice could be partially captured through presidential approval and party identification (Jacobson 2007). The same could in part be said for the Tea Party in 2010. Supporters of the Tea Party were more likely to be Republicans and to hold negative views of President Obama (Aldrich et. al 2012).

The main research question at the individual-level is whether the effect of individuals' economic evaluations on congressional vote choice differs when tested in pooled analyses. The literature has consistently found a lack of support for retrospective egotropic (pocketbook) evaluations affecting congressional vote choice. The support is similarly limited for retrospective evaluations of the national economy as well. In contrast with much of the literature, Romero and Stambough (1996) found support for retrospective pocketbook voting. Their analysis pooled the congressional elections from 1980 through 1988. Testing this effect in a pooled study of solely midterm elections from 1982 through 2002 is of interest in order to determine if findings differ when testing only in off-year elections. In addition, prospective economic evaluations can undergo further empirical testing, something that is now lacking in the literature (as compared to testing retrospective economic evaluations).

The individual-level analysis synthesizes and updates the literature. It will combine negative voting (Kernell 1977), along with measures of: economic evaluations, party identification, presidential approval, and the presence of an open seat U.S. House race into a pooled analysis (1982 through 2002) and singular analyses of the 2006 and 2010 midterm elections. Doing so can not only show how these effects differ in pooled as compared to

analyses of single elections, but can also update the literature. The ANES did not conduct time-series analyses in 2006 and 2010. By using CCES data, this research can test the predictive effect of these variables upon individuals' probability of voting for a U.S. House candidate of the president's party.

The 2006 and 2010 midterm elections each saw the president's party lose control of the U.S. House of Representatives. President Bush was less popular in 2006 (39% approval) than was President Obama in 2010 (45% approval). However, the economy was much weaker in 2010.<sup>4</sup> A comparative analysis of these two elections may show if presidential approval or economic evaluations were a more powerful driver of vote choice. An hypothesis is that presidential popularity (due to Bush's lower rating) had a stronger effect on vote choice in 2006, while the economy's effect was stronger in 2010. CCES analyses may show whether negative voting or economic voting was a stronger comparative determinant of vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2006 and 2010 midterms.

The plan of the study will be as follows: following the introduction, chapter two will thoroughly review the past literature on midterm elections as well as identify the gap that this research fills and the contribution it makes to the literature. Chapter three will describe in detail, the data and methods used. The fourth chapter will then summarize the findings of the aggregate-level analysis. Chapter five will discuss the findings of the individual-level analyses. After evaluating the findings, chapter six will conclude and discuss areas of future research.

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<sup>4</sup> The economy's strength (or lack thereof) is measured based on aggregate-level data. In 2006, the percent annual change in real disposable income was 3.1%. This number was 1.0% in 2010. This data was measured in chained 2005 dollars from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (2013).

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Numerous theories and explanations have been advanced as to why the president's party so often endures setbacks in midterm elections. Two of the most prominent of these are surge and decline and referendum. The strategic politician thesis (Jacobson and Kernell 1983) is another important theory that attempts to explain the phenomenon of midterm losses by the president's party. The strategic politician theory argues that members of Congress and potential candidates will choose to run or abstain from doing so based on conditions at the time of the midterm, such as the state of the economy and the popularity of the president. In short, a poor economy and unpopular president will dissuade quality candidates of the president's party from running. It may also encourage quality candidates of the opposition party to run, which will, in turn, hinder the president's party, thus leading to seat losses. This chapter will focus on several of the most prominent theories and arguments relating to seat loss at the aggregate level and vote choice at the individual level in midterm U.S. House elections. It will also delve into the scholarly debate regarding economic voting at both the aggregate and individual levels.

Campbell (1960) explained the phenomenon of midterm seat loss as a result of the prior presidential election. He argued that presidential elections were high-stimulus events that would bring both high and low-interest voters to the polls. This theory intuitively argues that presidential elections are the most captivating and interesting American political events. Surge and decline distinguishes between "core" and "peripheral" voters. Core voters are those individuals who have a high level of political interest and would vote in nearly every type of election. In contrast, peripheral voters tend to be less partisan and less politically engaged. They



are typically only drawn to the polls because of the high stimulus and excitement of a presidential election. They will be far less likely to vote in a low-stimulus midterm election.

One party is usually advantaged by short-term forces, which provide an electoral advantage and will typically lead a majority of peripheral voters to support this party. In 2008, with a very unpopular Republican president in office and an economic collapse that occurred under the watch of the Republicans, the Democrats were advantaged by short-term forces. According to surge and decline, one party, buoyed by advantageous short-term forces and the support of peripheral voters, will win the presidential election. This party will not only win the presidency, but will also increase its share of House seats as its candidates ride into office on the president's coattails.

When one party wins the presidency and additional House seats as a consequence of the "surge," there will, according to this theory, occur an inevitable "decline." The magnitude of the decline is contingent upon the magnitude of the surge. A presidential candidate who wins 55% of the two-party vote will tend to have a larger surge than would a candidate who won with 51% of the two-party vote. During the midterm decline, peripheral voters will be far less likely to vote and core voters will return to their partisan positions. As a result, many members of Congress will lose the extra support that brought them into office two years prior. Whereas the president's surge brought peripheral voters to the polls and his coattails brought more members of his party to Congress, the absence of the surge will cause members of the president's party to lose their seats.

Cover (1985) reexamined Campbell (1960)'s findings using survey data from 1952 through 1982 to test the key tenets of surge and decline. He found that there are a higher

percentage of core voters in midterm elections than in presidential elections, thus lending support to the theory of surge and decline. However, he also found that core voters really are not any more loyal to their parties than are peripheral ones. This runs counter to Campbell (1960). Cover's findings suggest that independents can be either core or peripheral voters, while Campbell's (1960) theory equated independents and peripheral voters.

There are two main implications of Cover's findings. The first is that a surge in turnout (among both core and peripheral voters), and thus seat gains in the House due to coattails, occurs in presidential elections. However, the fact that core and peripheral voters differ very little in terms of loyalty (e.g., Democrats voting Democrat for the U.S. House), implies that midterm seat losses are not simply due to peripheral voters failing to vote in midterm elections. He suggested two possible explanations. The first is that equilibrium forces exert themselves in midterm elections. In other words, a balance is restored between the two parties. His second explanation supports Tufte's (1975) referendum theory as Cover argued that conditions at the time of the midterm (presidential popularity and the economy) can affect seat loss. This research suggests that while Campbell's original theory does explain why the president's party gains seats in one-year presidential elections; it does not fully explain why the party loses seats at the midterm. In short, Cover's research does not reject surge and decline, but does not fully confirm it either.

Campbell (1987) also advanced a theory of surge of decline. Overall, this revision, tested using the 14 ANES studies from 1956 through 1982, supports the original theory, but argues that the surge of presidential elections and the advantageous short term forces that favor one party affects turnout among partisans, and not independents. Short-term forces will not necessarily cause partisan defections, but will lead to a large disparity in partisan turnout. In other words, if

short-term forces advantage the Republican Party, far more of their voters will turn out than will Democratic partisans. In short, surge and decline is modified, but still largely intact.

Campbell (1991) further tested the theory of surge and decline examining the 61 elections (presidential and midterm) from 1868 through 1988. He finds support for a presidential surge and a subsequent decline in midterm years. Essentially, a winning presidential candidate tends to benefit his party in congressional elections. The absence of a presidential candidate at the top of the ticket hurts his party as coattails are absent and voter turnout at the midterm is lowered. He finds that the influence of surge and decline has decreased over this time period, but still has an effect on midterm seat loss for the president's party in the House. Surge and decline can explain some, but not all, of the midterm seat loss experienced by the president's party.

In contrast to surge and decline, referendum theory (Tufte 1975) argued that seats losses suffered by the president's party cannot be sufficiently explained by the events of the presidential election two years prior. One of Tufte's core arguments, and indeed a cornerstone of the referendum theory, is that surge and decline does not account for the number of seats lost by the president's party. While a decline may be expected as the midterm electorate loses peripheral voters and the president's party loses its short-term advantages, this does not explain the magnitude of losses across elections. In short, solely examining the president's electoral margin of victory two years prior is not a sufficient explanation for midterm seat loss.

Referendum theory focuses primarily on two variables: presidential popularity and the economy. Tufte measures presidential popularity through Gallup's measure of presidential approval. This is perhaps the least controversial subject in the midterm literature. Many scholars have used Gallup data, a consistent and accurate measure of presidential approval

ratings since 1945. Scholars who study the referendum theory of midterm loss necessarily need to incorporate a variable for economic conditions. Tufte's measure of pre-election economic conditions is the yearly change in real disposable income per capita. Tufte cites Kramer (1971), who found that real income appeared to have a greater link to congressional vote choice than did other variables measuring economic performance, such as inflation and the unemployment rate. Tufte found both presidential approval ratings and yearly changes in real disposable personal income per capita (his independent variable for the economy) to be statistically significant. This model incorporated the midterm election of 1938 and the midterm elections from 1946 through 1970.

Campbell (1985) synthesized these two theories into one model arguing that midterm seat losses by the president's party are a result of both the prior presidential election and conditions at the midterm. Campbell's research, however, showed that the economy did not have a statistically significant effect on seat loss for the president's party when controlling for surge and decline (operationalized as the president's share of the two-party vote in the last election) and Gallup's measure of presidential popularity at the fall of the midterm election year. He found further support for this when testing the model over the midterm elections of 1946 through 1994 (Campbell 1997b: 124). Other scholars have also failed to find an aggregate-level effect of the economy on midterm election outcomes (Alesina and Rosenthal 1989; Marra and Ostrom 1989; Erikson 1990; and Lynch 2002).

Alesina and Rosenthal (1989) suggest a spurious association between economic conditions and U.S. House midterm election outcomes. They argue that economic expectations of voters (which party will best manage the economy) affect the outcomes of presidential

elections and that voters then support the opposition party two years later at the midterm in order to counter-balance the president. Erikson (1988) suggests a similar “presidential penalty” in which voters seek political and ideological moderation. Campbell (1985; 1997b: 125-126) and Erikson (1990) find that economy fails to attain a statistically significant effect on seat loss and vote share, respectively, for the president’s party in U.S. midterm House elections. Campbell (1997b) does not completely discount the effect of the economy, but instead suggests an indirect link between midterm elections and economic conditions, arguing that the state of the economy affects presidential popularity which in turn affects the outcomes of U.S. House midterm elections. The implications of these findings are that the economy largely does not matter in midterm elections. The most important influences on midterm losses for the president’s party are the approval rating of the president and the withdrawn coattails from the presidential election two years prior.

Erikson (1990) found that the economy (measured through personal income growth) affects presidential elections. Essentially the winning presidential candidate’s coattails will bring with him additional members of his party to Congress. However, he found no statistically significant link between presidential popularity and the economy over the 11 midterm elections from 1946 through 1986. In short, the economy does not directly or indirectly affect the outcomes of midterm elections. He returns to his presidential penalty argument (1988), suggesting that voters may vote against the president’s party at the midterm in order to achieve ideological and policy moderation. Lynch (2002) argues that economic voting is time-dependent and no longer affects aggregate outcomes of U.S. House elections as the power to influence

fiscal and monetary policy shifted away from Congress and towards the president and Federal Reserve in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars who have found that the economy does not affect the outcomes of midterm elections tend to posit an indirect effect, in that the state of the economy affects the popularity of the president. Implications are that the state of the national economy at the midterm matters more for the president (in terms of his popularity) than it does for members of his party in the U.S. House of Representatives. This perspective theorizes that at the aggregate level, the state of the national economy is a part of voter evaluations of the president. In short, the economy's effect on midterm election is channeled through the president, be it via coattails in the presidential election (Erikson 1990) or through the president's midterm popularity (Alesina and Rosenthal 1989; Campbell 1997b).

While some scholars discount the aggregate-level effect of the economy, many others (Kramer 1971 and 1983; Fiorina 1978; Hibbing and Alford 1981; Jacobson 1990; Chappell and Suzuki 1993; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; Rudalevige 2001; and Fair 2009) support Tufte's contention that it does indeed affect the fortunes of the president's party.<sup>6</sup> If voters do view the president as a steward of the economy (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000) and see him as most responsible for the state of the economy, it would make sense for voters to reward him (and his party) for a strong economy and punish his party for a poor one. At the midterm, voters cannot directly reward or punish the president as he is not running for reelection. As such, this may

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<sup>5</sup> Lynch uses GNP as his economic independent variable as opposed to real disposable income due to data availability constraints prior to 1914. His analysis ran from 1874 through 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Kramer (1971), Jacobson (1990) and Chappell and Suzuki (1993), and Fair (2009) use the two-party vote share of the national vote for the U.S. House of Representatives elections as their dependent variable as opposed to the change in House seats for the president's party. Findings relating to the economy's effect on midterm House elections are similar whether the dependent variable is vote share or changes in seats held.

imply that in midterm elections, voters reward or punish the president's party in Congress based in part on the state of the national economy. Overall, the literature generally supports Tufte's (1975) referendum theory and the aggregate-level effect of the economy on the outcomes of midterm U.S. House elections, but is certainly not in unanimous agreement.

Despite testing over different time periods, aforementioned scholars (Fiorina 1978; Kramer 1983; Jacobson 1990; and Rudalevige 2001) found real disposable income per capita to have a statistically significant effect on the outcomes of midterm U.S. House elections. This held true whether the dependent variable of interest was national vote share or seat changes in U.S. midterm House elections.<sup>7</sup> Chappell and Suzuki (1993) and Fair (2009) used gross national product (GNP) growth as their measure of economic growth, and tested over both on and off-year congressional elections. However, these studies included dummy variables for midterm elections when appropriate (thus differentiating between on and off-year House elections), and found similar results relating to the aggregate-level effect of the economy on midterm U.S. House elections.

While there is evidence to support the economy's effect on midterm elections at the aggregate level, the same is not true at the individual level. Kramer (1983) posits an explanation for the absent link between economic voting in midterm elections at the aggregate-and individual-levels arguing that, while individual vote choice in congressional elections may be affected by economic perceptions, measuring this is very difficult unless voters attribute changes

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<sup>7</sup> Rudalevige (2001) also tested the effect of the annual change in state real disposable income per capita, but found it to be a statistically insignificant predictor of the Democratic Party's share of the two-party vote in midterm U.S. House elections.

in economic conditions to the policies of the federal government. He concludes by arguing that economic voting in congressional elections is best studied at the aggregate level.

Fiorina (1978) found a relationship between aggregate economic conditions and the vote share for the president's party in the House, but from 1956 through 1974, personal economic evaluations did not affect vote choice in midterm congressional elections. Kinder and Kiewiet (1979) were among the first scholars to quantitatively examine the voting behavior of individuals. In regression analyses covering the elections of 1956 through 1976, the authors found that with the exception of 1956 and 1976, personal economic evaluations had no effect upon vote choice for the House. Their findings confirmed a lack of pocketbook voting (in which voters evaluate changes in their personal financial condition), but these authors did establish that vote choice for the House is affected by individuals' perceptions of the national economy. This research established the lack of support for the pocketbook voting thesis found in the literature, but demonstrated that individuals' sociotropic retrospective evaluations can influence voting behavior for the U.S. House of Representatives. However, this only occurred in the two on-year congressional elections of 1956 and 1976.

Hibbing and Alford (1981) found that at the individual level, retrospective economic voting does occur. However, using 1978 ANES data, retrospective pocketbook voting is only significant when an individual's congressman was an incumbent of the president's party. In short, controlling for incumbency matters when studying economic voting. Abramowitz (1985) studied the midterm elections of 1974, 1978, and 1982 at the individual level. He is one of the few scholars to test only off-year (midterm), and not on-year, elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. He does not find a statistically significant effect for either sociotropic or



egotropic economic evaluations on vote choice. His findings could imply an indirect link between personal economic evaluations and congressional vote choice. Individuals' perceptions of economy can affect their evaluation of the president which can, in turn affect their vote choice in midterm elections. These findings could imply a link between the economy and midterm elections similarly to the aggregate-level theory (Alesina and Rosenthal 1989; Campbell 1997b) which argues that the state of the national could influence presidential popularity which may in turn influence the outcomes of midterm elections. In short, the effect of the economy on midterm elections may be indirect at both the aggregate and individual levels.

Kuklinski and West (1981) argued that past individual-level studies of economic voting have incorrectly used retrospective, rather than prospective, questions in order to test economic voting. The authors used 1978 ANES data, employing logistic regression to test how prospective (future) economic evaluations affect the vote in congressional elections. They find that prospective economic voting exists in Senate elections, but not for the House. Lockerbie (2008) also tests how prospective economic evaluations affect the voting behavior of the electorate. He tested the effect of both retrospective and prospective economic evaluations in presidential, senatorial, and House elections from 1956 through 2000. Using ANES survey data from 1956 through 2002, Lockerbie finds, similarly to presidential elections, that prospective sociotropic evaluations may influence congressional elections and are stronger and more often statistically significant than are retrospective sociotropic evaluations (Lockerbie, 2008, 83-84). This generally holds true for both on and off-year House elections. Lockerbie finds that prospective economic evaluations remain statistically significant even when controlling for incumbency of a House candidate. While his analysis lends support to the effect of prospective sociotropic

economic evaluations on vote choice, he is unable to find support for the pocketbook (egotropic) voting thesis.

In contrast with most of the literature, Romero and Stambough (1996) find support for pocketbook voting in congressional elections. They tested the effect of personal retrospective economic evaluations at the individual level. In contrast to past studies that examined only a single election or a series of single elections, the authors pooled the election data from 1980 through 1988 using the ANES cumulative data file. In this analysis, the authors found support for the pocketbook voting thesis. However, their findings were obtained by pooling both on and off-year congressional elections. Limited support for economic voting in on-year congressional elections has been found (Fiorina 1978; Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; Lockerbie 2008), but evidence that individuals' economic evaluations affect vote choice in midterm congressional elections is nearly non-existent. In order to reconcile the findings between these two types of elections, midterm elections should be studied separately from on-year congressional elections. This can help to best analyze how individual-level economic perceptions specifically affect vote choice in midterm elections.

The midterm election literature has generally found little support for economic voting at the individual level, be it sociotropic or egotropic. Personal economic (egotropic) evaluations may not influence individual vote choice in midterm House elections unless voters attribute blame to the federal government for the state of the national economy (Kramer 1983; Lockerbie 2008). In short, voters will not blame the government for their personal economic conditions unless they perceive the state of the economy as the responsibility of the government. In terms of the national economy, voters may not attribute blame to individual members of Congress,

instead using the performance of the national economy to evaluate the president's job performance (Abramowitz 1985). The implications are that U.S. House candidates may be spared voters' wrath for the state of the national economy. Instead, incumbency, candidate familiarity, and party identification may be much more powerful cues in terms of vote choice in midterm elections. Whether the economy affects midterm seat loss directly or indirectly through presidential evaluations, it does not benefit an incumbent president to preside over a poor economy in a midterm election year.

The contention that presidential popularity, the second key tenet of the referendum theory, affects both seat loss and vote choice in midterm elections generates very little debate within the literature. Negative voting was advanced by Kernell (1977) as an alternative to surge and decline. The study examined midterm voting behavior at the individual level from 1946 through 1966. Kernell found that individuals with a negative evaluation of the president will be less likely to vote for a U.S. House candidate of the president's party in midterm elections. In addition, presidential disapproval leads to more partisan defections than does presidential approval. These findings held even when controlling for party identification. For independent voters, disapproval of the president will have a greater effect on vote choice in congressional elections than will approval of the president.

Cover (1986) largely advances the negative voting thesis, finding that in the 1974, 1978, and 1982 midterm elections, negative evaluations of the president made individuals less likely to vote for U.S. House candidates from the president's party. In contrast to Kernell (1977), Cover found that evaluations of the president have little effect on whether one turns out to vote in

midterm elections, but at the individual level, presidential evaluations can affect vote choice. In other words, presidential popularity matters in midterm elections.

Erikson (1988) argues that negative evaluations of the president make voters more likely to turn out and vote in a midterm election. He also suggests that individuals may vote against the president's party in the midterm in order to bring more ideological balance to Washington perhaps indicating voter support for divided government. The important finding from this research is that the regression coefficient estimate for party is negative in each model that Erikson specifies and that the president's party would perform better in congressional elections if it were not in power. In short, the president's party is punished in midterm elections simply for being in power.

The exposure thesis (Oppenheimer, Stimson and Waterman 1986) has been advanced as an alternative to surge and decline and referendum. This theory differs from surge and decline (Campbell 1960) and referendum (Tuftes 1975) in that it does not focus on the events of the prior presidential election nor conditions at the time of the midterm when attempting to explain midterm losses by the president's party. These authors instead argue that seat loss in the House is contingent upon a party's exposure. This is essentially whether the number of U.S. House seats a party holds at the midterm exceeds its average. Their analysis is tested through midterm and presidential-year congressional elections from 1938 through 1984. Their dependent variable is the number of seats lost in the House by the president's party at the midterm. Their primary independent variable of exposure is calculated by subtracting the equilibrium number of Democratic House seats (254, which is the average number of Democratic House seats held from the time period of 1938 through 1984) from the number of House seats held by Democrats at the

election. The authors tested this variable in both on and off-year congressional elections, finding it to be statistically significant and to increase the  $R^2$  when included in models using presidential popularity and economic conditions.

Later research by the same authors (1991) also found that exposure retained its explanatory power when controlling for surge and decline (the president's vote share in the last election). However, this analysis tested both presidential and off-year congressional elections. When including exposure with prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, economic conditions, and testing over only midterm elections from 1946 through 1994, Campbell (1997b: 81) found it lacked statistical significance and had extremely low explanatory power. Testing over the congressional elections (both on and off-year) of 1962 through 1994, Gaddie (1997) also rejected exposure's explanatory power, but did find it affected the seat losses of the president's party when operationalized as the number of exposed open House seats (those in which an incumbent House candidate is not running). While the exposure thesis implies that the more House seats a party holds going into the midterm, the more it should lose, there is a discussion in the literature concerning the explanatory power this variable.

At the aggregate level, the literature gap relates to how midterm elections have been studied. Surge and decline and referendum are two of the main competing theories. Prior to Campbell (1985), these theories were studied independently. He brought the two together, using seat loss as his dependent variable with: prior two-party vote share for the president in the last presidential election, annual percent annual change in real disposable income per capita, and presidential popularity at the time of the midterm as his main independent variables. His OLS regression model, which tested these four variables, found the strength of the regression

coefficient for the economy to be statistically insignificant when including the results of the prior presidential election in the model. Scholars such as Cover (1985) and Campbell himself (1991) found a weakening of surge and decline over the latter twentieth century. This could imply a weakening of presidential coattails. As such, the coefficient estimate for prior presidential vote may decrease when updating this research through the 2010 midterm election. As a consequence, the other variables in the model (presidential popularity and the economy) may gain explanatory power as it relates to what affects seat loss in the House. In short, updating this research may show a different result for economic conditions at the midterm, one that is more in line with the existing midterm literature.

The main gap at the individual level, and thus the main contribution of this research, relates to pooled analyses of midterm elections and prospective economic voting. Analyses of congressional elections have consistently found a lack of support for retrospective pocketbook voting. However, most of these studies have been conducted by analyzing a single election or a limited series of single elections. Pooled analyses of congressional elections are rare in the midterm literature. Those that have been conducted focused on congressional elections in both presidential and midterm years. In addition, these analyses focused on individuals' retrospective economic evaluations. Those that examined prospective economic evaluations did so in both on and off-years. In short, individual-level studies of congressional elections have not focused exclusively on midterm elections, have conducted comparatively fewer pooled analyses, and tended to focus much more on retrospective economic evaluations rather than prospective. This research can help to fill a small gap within the midterm literature.

The data from six midterm elections from 1982 through 2002 will be pooled using the ANES cumulative data file. This will allow for testing how both egotropic and sociotropic economic evaluations (measured retrospectively and prospectively) may affect an individual's probability of supporting a U.S. House candidate of the president's party. As there were no ANES time-series studies conducted in 2006 and 2010, this research can also contribute to the literature through an update by testing the 2006 and 2010 midterm elections using CCES data. Aldrich et. al (2012) studied the 2010 midterms at the individual level using data from the 2010 CCES. While comprehensive, their analysis did not include controls for individuals' economic evaluations. Logistic regression models of these two elections may also help show how presidential disapproval and voters' economic evaluations affected vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives.

In summary, this thesis will contribute to the literature through a synthesis of multiple leading theories of midterm loss. At the aggregate level, it will update and build on Campbell's (1985) research, providing further testing of the economy's effect on seat loss. It will also incorporate exposure, presidential party, the number of uncontested House races for the president's party, divided government, and the political realignment of the South into a comprehensive model that examines the potential influence of multiple variables that can affect seat loss. At the individual level, it will provide further testing of pooled analyses, empirical analysis that has been conducted far less frequently than studying a single or series of single midterm elections.

As a previous pooled analysis (Romero and Stambough 1996) made findings contrary to much of the literature (namely the statistical significance of retrospective pocketbook voting),

pooling of the data from six midterm elections from 1982 through 2002 using the ANES cumulative data file can support or contradict this finding. It can also test how prospective sociotropic and egotropic economic evaluations affect vote choice in congressional elections. These variables have most commonly been measured retrospectively. Future-oriented questions regarding individuals' economic evaluations merit additional testing. The individual-level analysis also synthesizes the literature, incorporating Kernell's (1977) negative voting thesis into a model that also includes measures of: presidential approval, economic evaluations, voters' familiarity with the U.S. House candidates, the presence of an open seat U.S. House race, and party identification.



## CHAPTER THREE: DATA AND METHODS

### Aggregate-Level Variables

#### **Dependent Variable**

Midterm seat loss in the U.S. House of Representatives for the president's party (see Campbell 1985) is defined as the difference between House seats won at the midterm by the president's party and the number of House seats won at the previous presidential election by the president's party. These data are obtained from the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives (2013).

Eight independent variables (prior presidential vote, presidential popularity, the economy, presidential party, exposure, the number of uncontested House races for the president's party, realignment, and divided government) will be employed. Seven models will be estimated. Every model will include the following variables: prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and the economy. The second through the sixth models will individually test the effect of presidential party, exposure, uncontested House races, realignment, and divided government, along with the three aforementioned variables. A seventh model will include all eight independent variables, testing their combined effect on midterm seat loss for the president's party in the U.S. House of Representatives.

#### **Independent Variables**

Prior presidential vote is defined as the president's share of the two-party vote in the immediately previous election. It is calculated by adding the number of popular votes won by the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees and dividing the winning candidate's

votes by that total. In 1996, for example, President Bill Clinton won reelection with 49.2% of the national popular vote. Clinton won 54.7% of the two-party vote. These data are obtained from the Roper Center, University of Connecticut (2013).

Presidential popularity is defined as the Gallup measure of presidential approval in the fall prior to the midterm.<sup>8</sup>

The variable for the economy, which Campbell found to be statistically insignificant in his 1985 research, is operationalized as the annual percent change in real disposable income per capita. Kramer (1971) found this variable to have the greatest link to the congressional vote as compared to inflation or the unemployment rate. It was also employed by Tufte (1975) in his original referendum model. This will be calculated in chained 2005 dollars from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and the economy were the three variables tested in Campbell's (1985) combined model, (see table 1). In addition to simply updating his research through the 2010 midterm elections, additional explanatory variables will be tested in order to supplement his model and achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence seat loss in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. The first of these variables, exposure, is drawn from Oppenheimer, Stimson, and Waterman (1986). This variable will be operationalized as a moving average, differently than it was by these authors. Exposure for the president's party will be calculated by subtracting each party's

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<sup>8</sup> The time frame measuring the popularity of each president at the midterm was not the same. In his research, Campbell (1985) explicitly states that Kennedy had a Gallup approval rating of 67% and Truman had an approval rating of 33%. Looking at historical tracking data from Gallup (2013), Kennedy had an approval of 67% from August 23rd – August 28th of 1962. Truman's approval rating was at 33% (very close to 32%), from September 13th – September 18th of 1946. In short, every effort was made to find the president's Gallup approval rating as close as possible to these dates. Each president's approval rating was measured from Gallup in late August or early September before the midterm election.

equilibrium number of U.S. House seats over the last four elections (both on and off-year congressional elections) from the number of House seats held by the president's party at the time of the midterm election. For example, the average number of House seats the Democratic Party held from 2002 through 2008 (the four elections preceding the 2010 midterm election), was 213. In 2010, for example, the Democrats had 44 exposed seats (257-213).

A dummy variable for presidential party (coded 1 if the president is a Republican and 0 if he is a Democrat) was drawn from Coleman (1997) who advanced the idea that Democratic and Republican presidents are treated differently at the midterm, with the former receiving harsher treatment from voters. He also suggested party as a possible cause of the Democratic rout in 1994 positing that under the same circumstances (margin of victory two years prior, economic conditions, presidential popularity, and the number of safe seats), a Republican president would have lost approximately 20 House seats. In short, voters expect a Democratic president to pass more legislation and to preside over a stronger economy as compared to a Republican president. When Democratic presidents fail to meet voters' lofty expectations, they will be punished at the midterm. While Republican presidents can certainly be punished at the midterm, the bar that they must meet in order to satisfy voters is much lower than for Democratic presidents. However, since the time of Coleman's research, voters have rewarded (1998 and 2002) and punished (2006 and 2010) presidents of both parties at the midterm. Further testing of this variable's explanatory power is of interest.

The number of uncontested races in the midterm election for U.S. House of Representatives will be operationalized as the number of House races in which the opposition party (the Republicans when a Democrat is president and vice versa) did not field a candidate.

This is drawn in part from Wrighton and Squire (1997) who showed that the number of uncontested Democratic seats has fallen over the time period of 1912 to 1994 as a result of fewer Southern seats going uncontested, while the number of uncontested Republican seats has risen. This could imply that both parties now have a similar number of uncontested seats and that a higher number of uncontested U.S. House races could aid the president's party, which is traditionally disadvantaged at the midterm. In short, more uncontested races could mean fewer seats for the president's party to defend which implies that the party has fewer seats that it could potentially lose at the midterm.

A variable for realignment will attempt to capture the decline in Democratic Party identification among the electorate, an occurrence due in part to the political realignment of the South from Democratic to Republican (Abramowitz 1995; Campbell 1997a; Black and Black 2002; Bullock, Hoffman, and Gaddie 2005; Hayes and McKee 2008; McKee 2010). While Republican successes in U.S. House elections (particularly in the South) did not come to fruition until 1994 (Abramowitz 1995, Bullock, Hoffman, and Gaddie 2005; McKee 2010), a realignment of the electorate towards the Republican Party began in the 1980s (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Meffert, Norpoth, and Ruhil 2001). These findings, along with research by Campbell (1997a), provide justification for using 1982 as the beginning point of a Republican realignment. As this variable attempts to measure the advantage that the Republican Party gained following a decline in Democratic Party identification and shift of the South's party allegiance, this variable will be coded 0 for all midterms before 1982 (1946 through 1978). It

will be coded 1 when the president is a Republican (1982 through 2010) and 0 when the president is a Democrat (1982 through 2010).<sup>9</sup>

The eighth and final independent variable will control for the effect of divided government on seat loss for the president's party. Research has found that divided government can affect blame attribution (Nicholson and Segura 1999; Rudolph 2003), making it more difficult for voters to assign responsibility to one party for national conditions, the state of the economy being an example. As such, this can make it more difficult for voters to reward or punish the president's party. In short, under divided government, one party is not fully responsible for the state of the economy, and thus, may not be fully culpable in the minds of voters.<sup>10</sup> In comparison to the effect of divided government on individual vote choice, the effect of divided government on aggregate outcomes of U.S. House elections has been underexplored. Indeed, Nicholson and Segura (1999) suggest this as an area of future research. The variable included in this analysis will be coded 1 if at least one chamber of Congress (House or Senate) is controlled by the opposition party (the party not in the White House) and 0 if both houses of Congress and the White House are controlled by the same party.

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<sup>9</sup> Campbell (1997) tests different midterm election years (1946 through 1994) as the starting point for the Republican realignment in the South. 1982 had by far the highest adjusted  $R^2$  at nearly .90 (figure 1, page 846). As such, this was the starting point for realignment for his analysis and for this research as well.

<sup>10</sup> Norpoth (2001), however, finds that even under divided government, the president receives more of the responsibility for economic conditions. He analyzed exit polls from 1992 and 1996 finding that economic voting is not affected by divided government. Under divided government voters will assign responsibility for the state of the economy to the president, instead of Congress, and will punish (reward) him accordingly.

## Individual-Level Variables

All variables for the pooled analysis will be obtained from the American National Election Studies (ANES) cumulative data file. This analysis employs data from the six midterm elections from 1982 through 2002. The dependent and each independent variable will be obtained by recoding ANES variables into dummy variables appropriate for use in a logistic regression model.

### **ANES Pooled Analysis: 1982-2002**

#### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives is coded 1 if an individual voted for the U.S. House candidate of the president's party and 0 if an individual voted for the opposition party candidate.<sup>11</sup>

#### Independent Variables

The independent variable of presidential disapproval measures individuals' evaluations of the president's job performance. It is coded 1 for disapprove and 0 for approve.<sup>12</sup>

Four different types of economic variables will be employed in this analysis. The first, sociotropic retrospective economic evaluations, measures individuals' view of the national

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<sup>11</sup> This variable will be coded 1 for a Republican House vote in 1982, 1986, 1990, and 2002 and 0 for a Democratic House vote in these years. This variable will be coded 1 for a Democratic House vote in 1994 and 1998, and will be coded 0 for a Republican House vote in 1994 and 1998. Those respondents who said they "did not vote," "refused to say," or were "unsure," were coded as missing as the objective of this analysis is to measure vote choice, not the action of voting versus abstaining.

<sup>12</sup> The ANES also included a variable measuring intensity of presidential approval VCF 0451 (strongly or somewhat approve/disapprove). However, the goal is to simply measure presidential disapproval versus approval. As such, VCF 0450 (approve vs. disapprove) was employed in this analysis.

economy's performance in the past year. Two dummy variables will be created: "Did the national economy worsen in the past year?" will be coded 1 if an individual thinks that the national economy worsened in the past year and 0 if an individual does not think that it worsened. "Did the national economy improve in the past year?" will be coded 1 if an individual thinks that the national economy improved over the past year and 0 if an individual does not think that it improved. Those individuals who think that the national economy remained the same over the past year will be the base group for both variables.

The coding will be similar for each type of economic condition. Sociotropic prospective economic evaluations measure individuals' expectations of how the national economy will perform in the next year. "Will the national economy worsen in the next year?" is coded 1 if an individual thinks that the national economy will worsen in the next year and 0 if an individual does not think that it will worsen. The second sociotropic prospective variable, "will the national economy improve in the next year?" is coded 1 if an individual thinks that the national economy will improve over the next year and 0 if an individual does not think that it will improve. Individuals who think that the national economy will remain the same in the next year will be the base group.

The ANES pooled analysis will also include measures of egotropic economic evaluations that measure individuals' perceptions of their personal financial (pocketbook) evaluations. This will be measured both retrospectively and prospectively. Similarly to the variables for sociotropic economic evaluations, dummy variables will be created to measure both worse and better personal financial evaluations of individuals. The first variable for retrospective egotropic economic evaluations, "did the individual's personal financial condition worsen in the past

year?” will be coded 1 if an individual thinks that their personal financial situation worsened in the past year and 0 if an individual does not think that it worsened. The second, “did the individual’s personal financial condition improve in the past year?” will be coded 1 if an individual thinks that their personal financial condition improved over the past year and 0 if an individual does not think that it improved. Individuals who think that that their personal financial situation remained the same over the past year will be the base group.

The final group of economic variables is individual’s egotropic prospective economic evaluations. This is individuals’ answer to how they anticipate their personal financial condition to be in the next year. “Will the individual’s personal financial condition worsen in the next year?” is coded 1 if an individual thinks that their personal financial condition will worsen in the next year and 0 if an individual does not. “Did the individual’s personal financial condition improve in the next year?” is coded 1 if an individual thinks that their personal financial condition will improve over the next year and 0 if an individual does not think that it will improve. Individuals who think that their personal financial condition will remain the same in the next year will be the base group.

The literature has shown that congressional incumbents are more likely to win reelection (Erikson 1971; Jones 1981; Jacobson 1981; Jacobson 1997: 22) and that voters are more likely to vote for incumbent candidates (Abramowitz 1975; Cover 1977; Nelson 1978-1979; Jacobson 1981). Instead of controlling simply for incumbency, a variable for the presence of an open seat U.S. House race (one in which no incumbent candidate is running) can show if a lack of incumbency can affect individuals’ voting behavior in U.S. House midterm elections. This



variable will be coded 1 if the House race is an open seat contest and 0 if an incumbent representative is running for reelection.

This analysis will also control for party identification. Two dummy variables will be created with pure independents as the base group, in keeping with Keith et. al (1992) who showed that independents who lean towards the Democratic or Republican parties actually behave and vote in the same manner as partisans.<sup>13</sup> The two variables for party identification will be: Presidential Party ID and Opposition Party ID.<sup>14</sup> The first variable will be coded 1 if an individual shares the same party affiliation as the president of the United States and 0 if an individual does not. The second will be coded 1 if an individual shares the same party affiliation as the opposition party (the party not in control of the presidency) and 0 if an individual does not.

## **CCES Analysis: 2006**

### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of Republican U.S. House vote (the party of President George W. Bush) will be coded 1 if an individual voted for the Republican U.S. House candidate (in their

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<sup>13</sup> The ANES also included a seven-point measure of party identification (VCF 007: Strong, Weak, Independent Democrat/Republican and pure independent). However, the three-point scale was used because partisan “leaners” were included as members of the party toward which they leaned.

<sup>14</sup> For 1982, 1986, 1990, and 2002, *presidential party ID* will be coded 1 if the respondent identifies with the Republican Party and 0 if identify as a Democrat. For 1994 and 1998, this variable will be coded 1 if the respondent identifies with the Democratic Party and 0 if they identify as Republicans. *Opposition party ID* will be coded 1 if the respondent identifies with the Democratic Party in 1982, 1986, 1990, and 2002 and 0 if they identify as Republican in these years. For 1994 and 1998, this variable will be coded 1 for Democratic Party identification and 0 for identification with the Republican Party.

specific congressional district) and 0 if an individual voted for the Democratic U.S. House candidate.<sup>15</sup>

### Independent Variables

The independent variable for presidential evaluations, (Bush disapproval) will be coded 1 if an individual disapproves of President Bush's job performance and 0 if an individual approves of his job performance.

In contrast to the ANES pooled analysis, the only economic variable available in the CCES relates to sociotropic retrospective evaluations. This is a measure of individuals' view of the national economy in the past year. As was the case in the ANES pooled analysis, two dummy variables will be obtained from the 2006 CCES. The first ("did the national economy worsen in the past year?") will be coded 1 if an individual thinks that the national economy worsened over the past year and 0 if an individual does not think that it worsened. The second ("did the national economy improve in the past year?") will be coded 1 if an individual thinks that the national economy improved over the past year and 0 if an individual does not think that it improved. Those individuals who think that the national economy remained the same in the past year will be the base group for both variables.

The independent variable for open seat U.S. House race can show whether an individual was more (or less likely) to vote for a Republican House candidate in a race not involving an incumbent representative. This variable will be coded 1 if the House race is an open seat contest and 0 if an incumbent representative is running for reelection.

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<sup>15</sup> Those respondents who said they "did not vote," "did not vote in this race," were "not sure," or who voted for a third or fourth party candidate were coded as missing.

Variables for knowledge of the U.S. House candidates are exclusive to the 2006 CCES analysis. These independent variables control for individuals' knowledge of the House candidates. This has been shown to increase the likelihood of voting for a House candidate (Abramowitz 1975; Jacobson 1981; Jacobson 1997: 94). The first variable of Democratic House candidate familiarity will be coded 1 if an individual has heard of the Democratic House candidate and 0 if an individual has not heard of the candidate. The second variable of Republican House candidate familiarity will be coded 1 if an individual has heard of the Republican House candidate and 0 if an individual has not heard of the candidate.<sup>16</sup>

Two independent variables for party identification (Democrat and Republican) will be created with pure independents as the base group. Democrat will be coded 1 if an individual identifies with the Democratic Party and 0 if an individual does not. Republican will be coded 1 if an individual identifies with the Republican Party and 0 if an individual does not.

The variables for the 2010 CCES analysis will be essentially the same as those for the 2006 analysis. The main difference is that the 2010 analysis will not include variables for U.S. House candidate familiarity due to a lack of availability of those data in the 2010 CCES survey.

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<sup>16</sup> This CCES question regarding candidate knowledge and familiarity did not distinguish between House challengers or incumbents. Nevertheless, this variable can still help demonstrate how knowledge (or lack thereof) of House candidates can influence vote choice.

## **CCES Analysis: 2010**

### Dependent Variable

As the president was a Democrat in 2010, the dependent variable will be Democratic U.S. House vote coded 1 if an individual voted for the Democratic U.S. House candidate and 0 if an individual voted for the Republican candidate in 2010.<sup>17</sup>

### Independent Variables

The independent variable for presidential evaluation (Obama disapproval) will measure individuals' disapproval of President Barack Obama's job performance. This variable will be coded 1 if an individual disapproves of President Obama's job performance and 0 if an individual approves of his job performance.

The variables for economic evaluations will be the same as the 2006 CCES analysis. The first variable ("did the national economy worsen in the past year?") will be coded 1 if an individual thinks that the national economy worsened over the past year and 0 if an individual does not think that it worsened. The second ("did the national economy improve in the past year?") will be coded 1 if an individual thinks that the national economy improved over the past year and 0 if an individual does not think that it improved. Those individuals who think that the national economy remained the same in the past year will be the base group for both variables.

The variable for open seat House race will also be essentially the same as that in the 2006 analysis. The only difference is that this independent variable shows whether an individual was

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<sup>17</sup> Similarly to the variables for U.S. House vote choice in the 1982-2002 pooled ANES analysis and the 2006 CCES analysis, respondents who said they voted for an "other" or "minor" party, "no one" or were "not sure" are coded as missing.

more (or less likely) to vote for a Democratic (as opposed to Republican) U.S. House candidate in a race not involving an incumbent representative. This variable will be coded 1 if the House race is an open seat contest and 0 if an incumbent representative is running for reelection.

Two independent variables for party identification (Democrat and Republican) will be created with pure independents as the base group. Democrat will be coded 1 if an individual identifies with the Democratic Party and 0 if an individual does not. Republican will be coded 1 if an individual identifies with the Republican Party and 0 if an individual does not.

In summary, both the aggregate and individual-level analyses will be quantitative in nature. The aggregate model will employ ordinary least squares regression (OLS) to measure the effect of prior presidential vote share, presidential approval, economic conditions, presidential party, exposure, the number of uncontested House races for the president's party, the realignment of the South, and divided government on seat loss for the president's party in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. This analysis will be tested over the 17 midterm elections from 1946 through 2010.

The individual-level analysis will consist of four separate logistic regression models. The reason for employing logistic regression is because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives). The first will test over a pooled series of elections (1982-2002) drawn from the ANES cumulative data file. This model will test the effect that: presidential approval, four types of economic evaluations, the presence of an open seat House race, and party identification have on the individuals' probability of voting for a U.S.

House candidate of the president's party in midterm elections.<sup>18</sup> Analyses of vote choice in the 2006 and 2010 will also be tested through logistic regression. These models will also test how presidential approval, sociotropic retrospective economic evaluations, the presence of an open seat House race, knowledge of the U.S. House candidates, and party identification affect the probability of voting for a U.S. House candidate of the president's party.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The four types of economic evaluations are: sociotropic retrospective (national economy in the past year), sociotropic prospective (national economy in the next year), egotropic retrospective (personal financial condition in the past year), and egotropic prospective (personal financial condition in the next year).

<sup>19</sup> The 2010 CCES did not include appropriate questions regarding knowledge of U.S. House candidates. As such, this variable will not be included into this model. It will, however, be included into the 2006 analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR: AGGREGATE-LEVEL ANALYSIS

This aggregate-level analysis updates and supplements the combined model (see table 1) of Campbell (1985). The main objective in updating this model is to further test the effect of the economy on seat loss for the president's party. Several scholars (Fiorina 1978; Alesina and Rosenthal 1989; Marra and Ostrom 1989; and Erikson 1990) found, similarly to Campbell (1985) that the economy does not affect midterm elections. However, others (Kramer 1971, 1983; Jacobson 1990; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; Rudalevige 2001, and Fair 2009) did find that the economy affects midterm elections. In short, reexamination of Campbell's combined model could yield an alternative finding relating to the economy, one that is more in line with the midterm literature.

The update of Campbell's (1985) combined model, along with empirical testing of: presidential party, exposure, uncontested House races, realignment, and divided government is presented in table 3. Seven different models will test the effect of the following independent variables: prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and economic conditions on seat loss for the president's party in the U.S. House of Representatives. Model 1, an update of Campbell's combined model (see table 1) will employ only these three independent variables. All other models will also include these three variables, but will also individually test the effects of presidential party, exposure, uncontested races, realignment, and divided government, respectively. Model 7 includes all eight independent variables.

Table 2: Aggregate-Level Regression Models: 1946-2010

Model	Independent Variables
Model 1 (Update)	Prior vote share, Presidential popularity, Economy
Model 2 (Presidential party)	Prior vote share, Presidential popularity, Economy, Presidential Party
Model 3 (Exposure)	Prior vote share, Presidential popularity, Economy, Exposure
Model 4 (Uncontested House races)	Prior vote share, Presidential popularity, Economy, Uncontested races
Model 5 (Realignment)	Prior vote share, Presidential popularity, Economy, Realignment
Model 6 (Divided government)	Prior vote share, Presidential popularity, Economy, Divided government
Model 7 (All variables)	Prior vote share, Presidential popularity, Economy, Presidential party, Exposure, Uncontested races, Realignment, Divided government

The coefficients for each model were all in the theoretically consistent direction (in terms of what Campbell found in his research) and the levels of statistical significance for prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and the economy remained similar in each model, thus confirming their explanatory power even when controlling for the other independent variables. A one percentage point increase in the president’s prior share of the two-party vote in the preceding presidential election costs his party approximately two seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. A one percentage point increase in the president’s approval rating leads to an approximate gain of one seat for his party in the U.S. House of Representatives.



Table 3: Models of Midterm Seat Loss for the President's Party: 1946-2010

Independent Variables	Model 1 (Update)	Model 2 (Party)	Model 3 (Exposure)	Model 4 (Uncon. Races)	Model 5 (Realign)	Model 6 (Div. Govt.)	Model 7 (All variables)
Prior Presidential Vote Share	-2.202** (.961)	-2.174** (.916)	-2.111** (.970)	-2.202** (1.007)	-1.968** (.870)	-2.458** (.917)	-1.990* (1.023)
Presidential Popularity	1.272*** (.699)	1.080*** (.290)	1.247*** (.276)	1.272*** (.288)	1.172*** (.251)	.989*** (.310)	.996** (.344)
Economy	3.309** (.353)	4.223** (1.545)	3.623** (1.536)	3.308* (1.721)	3.414** (1.341)	3.548** (1.412)	3.969* (1.898)
Presidential Party	—	11.512 (7.559)	—	—	—	—	6.082 (13.961)
Exposure	—	—	-.146 (.154)	—	—	—	-.138 (.179)
Uncontested House Races	—	—	—	.000 (.154)	—	—	.067 (.188)
Realignment	—	—	—	—	13.381* (6.566)	—	8.158 (10.447)
Divided Government	—	—	—	—	—	12.629 (7.664)	4.196 (10.809)
Intercept	19.399	20.112	17.053	19.391	7.815	41.952	13.043
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.646	.678	.643	.616	.715	.687	.643

*Dependent variable = seat loss*  
*Coefficients are unstandardized beta values*  
*Figures in parentheses are standard errors*  
*\*p < .10 \*\*p < .05 \*\*\*p < .01*

A one percentage point increase in real disposable income per capita (the measure of economic growth over the year preceding the midterm election) causes the president's party to gain between three and four House seats (the coefficient varies slightly in each model in table 3) at the midterm. In terms of the other independent variables (presidential party, exposure, uncontested House races, realignment, and divided government), their effect on seat loss is mixed at best. Neither presidential party, exposure, the number of uncontested House races, nor divided government attained statistical significance in any of the models. Presidential party (model 2) and divided government (model 6) came relatively close with t-statistics of 1.523 and 1.648, respectively. However, none of these variables were significant even at  $p < .10$ .

Aside from prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and the economy, the only other independent variable to attain statistical significance was realignment (model 5). This variable controls for the decline in the Democratic Party's massive post-New Deal advantage in party identification due in part to the South's shift in party allegiance from Democrat to Republican. This analysis shows that change in party identification (particularly in the South) benefits the Republican Party in midterm elections. Beginning in 1982, Republican presidents saw their party gain approximately 13 more U.S. House seats in midterm elections than did Democratic presidents. While Republican President George W. Bush saw his party lose 30 seats and House majority in 2006, Republican losses were far less severe (in terms of seats) than were Democratic losses under Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama who saw their party lose 54 and 63 U.S. House seats in 1994 and 2010, respectively. The realignment of the South towards the Republican Party could be an explanation as to why the Republican Party was not punished

as severely in 2006 despite the fact that Bush's 39% approval rating was the same as Clinton's and lower than Obama's 45%.

In each model, prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and the economy were statistically significant and their coefficients were in the hypothesized direction. Of the other variables, only the realignment variable in model 5 was statistically significant. This variable, drawn in part from Campbell (1997a), confirms both the explanatory power and the effect of southern realignment on the magnitude of midterm seat loss for the president's party in the U.S. House of Representatives. The fact that the economy attains statistical significance in each model also confirms its aggregate-level effect on midterm seat loss. This finding supports much of the midterm election literature and also refutes Campbell's (1985) findings which failed to find a statistically significant effect of economic conditions on seat loss. The linear regression equations and adjusted  $R^2$  for each model are listed in table 4. Inserting values for each variable generates seat loss predictions for the presidential party in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. For example, model 5 (realignment) can be used offer a prediction for the 2014 midterm elections. In 2012, Barack Obama won reelection with 52.0% of the two-party vote. Assuming average economic growth (2.0% growth in annual real disposable income per capita), and average popularity (53% approval rating in the fall of 2014), and inserting the value of 0 for Southern realignment as Obama is not a Republican post-1982, the Democratic Party would lose 26 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, resulting in a 260-175 Republican majority.

Table 4: Linear Regression Equations: Aggregate Models 1-7

Model	Equation	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
Model 1 (Update)	Seat Loss = 19.399 – 2.202**(prior vote) + 1.272***(popularity) + 3.309**(economy)	.646
Model 2 (Party)	Seat Loss = 20.112 – 2.174**(prior vote) + 1.080***(popularity) + 4.223**(economy)	.678
Model 3 (Exposure)	Seat Loss = 17.053 – 2.111**(prior vote) + 1.247***(popularity) + 3.623**(economy)	.643
Model 4 (Uncon. Races)	Seat Loss = 19.391 – 2.202**(prior vote) + 1.272***(popularity) + 3.308*(economy)	.616
Model 5 (Realignment)	Seat Loss = 7.815 – 1.968**(prior vote) + 1.172***(popularity) + 3.414**(economy) + 13.381*(realignment)	.715
Model 6 (Divided Govt.)	Seat Loss = 41.952 – 2.458**(prior vote) +.989***(popularity) + 3.548**(economy)	.687
Model 7 (All Variables)	Seat Loss = 13.043 – 1.990*(prior vote) + .996**(popularity) + 3.969*(economy)	.643

*Dependent variable = seat loss*

*Only the statistically significant coefficients and their unstandardized beta coefficients were included in each model's equation.*

*\*p < .10 \*\*p < .05 \*\*\*p < .01*

Looking solely at the adjusted  $R^2$  and statistically significant coefficients of each model is one method of determining their accuracy and predictive power. However, the purpose of this aggregate-level analysis is to create a model that can best predict the number of House seats the president's party will lose at the midterm election. The actual number of House seats lost by the president's party, the prediction for: Campbell's original model (tested from 1946 through 1982), and models 1-6 are shown in table 5. In addition, the average error for each model as well as the midterm elections for which each model was most and least accurate are listed.

Model 1, an update of Campbell's (1985) combined model, had an average error of 10.2 seats. It also found, contrary to Campbell, that the effect of the economy on seat loss was statistically significant.<sup>20</sup> Similarly to Campbell's original model, this model correctly predicted a loss of 12 House seats for Richard Nixon's Republican Party in 1970. It also made accurate predictions for 1966 and 2006 forecasting losses of 42 and 33 House seats for Johnson's Democrats and Bush's Republicans, respectively. This compares to actual losses of 47 seats in 1966 and 30 seats in 2006. Similarly to Campbell's original combined model, this model was quite inaccurate in predicting seat losses for the 1982 and 1986 midterm elections.<sup>21</sup> It overestimated Republican seat losses by 19 and 20 seats in these respective elections. It also greatly underestimated Democratic losses in 2010, predicting a seat loss of 38 compared to the actual 63 House seats lost by the Democrats.

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<sup>20</sup> As shown in table 3, each of the seven models found, contrary to Campbell (1985), that economic conditions (measured by the percent change in real disposable income per capita in the year preceding the midterm election) had a statistically significant effect on midterm House seat loss for the president's party.

<sup>21</sup> Campbell (1985) predicted a Republican loss of 34-39 seats in the House in 1986. This prediction was made using his integrated model (see table 1), but the combined model would make a similar prediction. The actual seat loss for the Republicans in 1986 was five.

Model 2, which included presidential party as an independent variable along with prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and economic conditions, had an average error of 11.2 seats, higher than model 1, and the second highest of any of the seven models. Presidential party came relatively close, but its estimated coefficient failed to attain statistical significance. Nevertheless, this model still correctly predicted a loss of 48 House seats for Dwight Eisenhower's Republican Party in 1958. It was also quite accurate in 1962, 1966, and 1974. It predicted seat losses of 3, 45, and 50 for Kennedy, Johnson, and Ford, respectively. Each of these predictions was within two of the actual seat loss. Similarly to model 1, this model was inaccurate in forecasting the 1982 and 1986 midterm elections, predicting seat losses of 50 and 33 for the House Republicans compared to the respective 26 and five seats Ronald Reagan's Republican Party lost in these two elections.

Model 3 included exposure into Campbell's updated model. While exposure is shown to have little effect on midterm seat loss, contrary to Oppenheimer, Stimson, and Waterman (1986), but similarly to Campbell (1997b: 82), this model still made very accurate predictions for the 1970 and 2006 midterm elections. It predicted a loss of 10 House seats for Nixon's Republicans in 1970, compared to the actual loss of 12 seats. For the 2006 elections, this model predicted a seat loss of 31, only one more than George W. Bush saw the Republicans lose in the House. Similarly to models 1 and 2, this model greatly overestimated the losses suffered by Reagan's Republican Party in 1982 and 1986. This model's most inaccurate forecast was in 2010, predicting a seat loss of 37 for Barack Obama's Democrats, far less than the 63 that the party actually endured.

The fourth model incorporated the number of uncontested House races for the president's party, along with prior presidential vote, presidential popularity, and economic conditions. One research objective of this thesis was to test how the number of uncontested House races affects seat loss for the president's party at the midterm. The present study expects that a higher number of uncontested races mean fewer seats to defend allowing the party to focus money, time, and attention elsewhere. This could benefit a party at the midterm. For the president's party in the House, however, this was shown not to be the case. Table 3 shows that the number of uncontested House races for the president's party has no discernible effect on the number of seats lost at the midterm. Due to the nil effect of uncontested House races on midterm seat loss, the average errors and seat loss predictions for model 4 are exactly the same as for model 1, the updated version of Campbell's (1985) model.

Model 5, which controlled for the shift in party identification towards the Republican Party, due in large part to the southern realignment, was the most accurate model. This model's average error of 9.1 seats was the lowest among any of the seven models. It was also the only one in which an independent variable other than prior presidential vote, presidential popularity, and the economy, attained a level of statistical significance.<sup>22</sup> This model also has the highest adjusted  $R^2$  (.715). This model's most accurate seat loss prediction was for the 2002 midterm elections. This model predicted a gain of nine House seats for the Republican Party in George W. Bush's first midterm election. This was only one more than the eight seats that the party actually gained. No other model was within five seats of a correct prediction. This model was also by far the most accurate in predicting the Republican Party's seat losses in 1982 and 1986.

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<sup>22</sup> While not significant at the conventional level of  $p < .05$ , as shown in table 3, the independent variable of Realignment was statistically significant at the .10 level with a t-statistic of 2.038 and a p-value of .064.

In short, the southern realignment benefits Republican presidents at the midterm, which is one possible explanation as to why Ronald Reagan's Republican Party did not suffer heavier losses in 1982 and 1986. However, this model was also the only one to incorrectly predict seat gains for George H.W. Bush in 1990. All of the other models predicted single-digit losses for the Republicans in the 1990 midterm elections.



Table 5: Midterm Seat Loss Models: Predictions and Errors

Year	Actual seat loss	Campbell (1985)	Model 1 (Update)	Model 2 (Party)	Model 3 (Exposure)	Model 4 (Uncon. races)	Model 5 (Realignment)	Model 6 (Divided govt.)	Model 7 (All variables)
1946	-54	-49	-63	-69	-62	-63	-66	-64	-68
1950	-29	-26	-17	-16	-13	-17	-20	-18	-19
1954	-18	-21	-24	-34	-23	-24	-29	-33	-36
1958	-48	-37	-39	-48	-38	-39	-43	-48	-49
1962	-4	-3	5	-3	7	5	-1	-3	-7
1966	-47	-48	-42	-45	-39	-42	-44	-47	-46
1970	-12	-12	-12	-17	-10	-12	-17	-17	-21
1974	-48	-50	-38	-50	-37	-38	-42	-51	-51
1978	-15	-18	-26	-29	-24	-26	-30	-28	-31
1982	-26	-40	-45	-50	-43	-45	-34	-48	-50
1986	-5	—	-25	-33	-23	-25	-16	-35	-34
1990	-8	—	-3	-14	-2	-3	5	-15	-17
1994	-54	—	-42	-46	-40	-42	-45	-44	-47
1998	5	—	-6	-12	-4	-6	-11	-14	-15
2002	8	—	2	-7	3	2	9	-7	-11
2006	-30	—	-33	-36	-31	-33	-23	-34	-38
2010	-63	—	-38	-44	-37	-38	-42	-42	-45
Average Error	—	+/- 4.0	+/- 10.1	+/-11.2	+/- 10.4	+/- 10.1	+/- 9.1	+/- 10.9	+/- 12.3
Most Accurate	—	1970	1958	1958	1970	1970	2002	1958, 1966	1958, 1966
Least Accurate	—	2010	1986	2010	2010	2010	2010	1986	1986

Divided government was incorporated into the sixth model. Similarly to presidential party in model 2, this variable came close to, but did not attain, statistical significance.<sup>23</sup> The average seat loss error for this model was 10.9, with the most accurate predictions being for 1958, 1962, and 1966. This model correctly predicted a seat loss of 48 and 47 for Eisenhower's Republican's and Johnson's Democrats in 1958 and 1966, respectively. In addition, this model underestimated the seat loss for Kennedy's Democrats by just one in 1962. This model's least accurate predictions were for the 1982, 1986, and 2010 elections. This model overestimated seat losses by 22 and 30 in 1982 and 1986, respectively. It underestimated Democratic seat losses by 21, similarly to each of the other six models. With the exception of model 5, which controlled for the realignment of the South towards the Republican Party, every model overestimated by double digits, the number of seats that the Republicans would lose in 1982 and 1986. This lends further support to the effect that the southern realignment has on aggregate-level seat changes for the president's party in the House.

The seventh and final model included all eight independent variables. The effect of: prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, the economy, presidential party, exposure, uncontested House races, realignment, and divided government on seat loss for the president's party are all tested in model 7. Only prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and the economy attained statistical significance. This model's adjusted  $R^2$  of .643 was also lower than models 1 (update), 2 (party), 5 (realignment), and 6 (divided government). This implies that

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<sup>23</sup> As presidential party (t-statistic of 1.523 and p-value of .154) and divided government (t-statistic of 1.648 and p-value of .125) came close to statistical significance, four additional models were run. Each model used seat loss as the dependent variable and included: prior presidential vote, presidential popularity, and the economy as independent variables. The first model also controlled for divided government and realignment, the second for divided government and party, the third for realignment and party, and a fourth for all three (divided government, realignment, and party). In none of these regression analyses did divided government nor presidential party attain statistical significance even at  $p < .10$ .

including the statistically insignificant variables of presidential party, exposure, uncontested House races, and divided government, could actually decrease the overall explanatory power of the model. One reason could be multicollinearity as presidential party correlates with divided government ( $r = .653$ ) and the number of uncontested House races ( $r = -.609$ ). However, even when removing these variables from the regression analysis, the only variables that attain statistical significance are prior vote share, presidential popularity, and the economy.

Realignment of the South towards the Republican Party, a variable obtained and modified from Campbell (1997a), was the only one to attain statistical significance (model 5). Including this variable increases the adjusted  $R^2$  to .715, from .646 in model 1 (update). In short, the realignment of the South matters in terms of aggregate-level seat loss in midterm elections. This finding provides a more accurate analysis of aggregate-level seat loss in the House for the president's party. It also lends support to findings regarding southern realignment on midterm seat loss (Campbell 1997a).

Exposure and the number of uncontested House races for the president's party did not come close to attaining statistical significance and lent little explanatory power to any of the models. When tested individually in models 1 through 6, these variables lacked statistical significance. The same held true in model 7 when tested along with all of the independent variables. Essentially these variables reduced the ability of these models to accurately predict midterm seat losses. Campbell (1997b: 80-83) argues that exposure is largely capturing the events of the prior presidential election (i.e. a larger surge implies that the president's party would have more House seats than average heading into the midterm election). He tests exposure in several ways including a simple bivariate regression between exposure and seat loss,

finding an  $R^2$  of approximately zero. In short, exposure is not an explanatory variable when included in a model of midterm seat loss combining surge and decline with referendum.

As Wrighton and Squire (1997) demonstrate, the number of uncontested Democratic House seats has been declining from 1912 to 1994, while the opposite is true for the Republican Party. This could imply a rise in competition for control of the U.S. House of Representatives. A higher number of uncontested House races for the president's party may mitigate the number of seat losses at the midterm. However, the analysis rejected this hypothesis. In 1946, for example, the Democratic Party had 72 uncontested House races, yet lost 54 seats and the majority. The number of uncontested House seats for the president's party fell to 39 in 1998, yet the Democratic Party actually gained five seats. In 2010, the number fell even further to just five, but similarly to 1946, the Democrats suffered catastrophic losses in the House. The regression analysis confirms that a high number of uncontested races fail to prevent high losses at the midterm.

These regression models have also shown that as compared to Campbell's (1985) research, the magnitude of the coefficient for presidential vote share has decreased, while the magnitude of the coefficient for presidential popularity has increased. This could imply a weakening of surge and decline and coattail effects and more importance on the president's approval rating as well as the state of the economy. Indeed Campbell (1991) found this when he measured the effect of coattails and surge and decline from 1868 through 1988. It is not implausible to think that this trend could continue through the 2010 midterm elections.

There are four main findings of this aggregate-level analysis. The first is that Campbell's (1985) combined model of surge and decline and referendum largely retains its predictive power

for midterm seat losses. The second is that the economy does matter statistically in studying seat loss at the aggregate level. The findings of this research disconfirm Campbell's (1985) findings as well as research by Alesina and Rosenthal (1989), Marra and Ostrom (1989), and Erikson (1990). In terms of the economy's effect on midterm seat loss, the findings of this research are consistent with much of the literature (Fiorina 1978; Kramer 1983; Jacobson 1990; Chappell and Suzuki 1993; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; and Fair 2009). The third main finding is that controlling for the political realignment of the South improves the explanatory power of models measuring midterm seat loss. This variable can offer better predictions and offer a potential explanation for the relatively positive midterm results for the Republican Party post-1982, the 2006 midterm notwithstanding. In short, the realignment of the South (Black and Black 2002) as part of a national realignment toward the Republican Party (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Meffert, Norpoth, and Ruhil 2001) affects midterm seat loss for the president's party in the U.S. House of Representatives. The fourth main finding relates to those variables that failed to attain statistical significance. The political party of the president (Coleman 1997), exposure (Oppenheimer, Stimson and Waterman 1986), the number of uncontested races (Wrighton and Squire 1997), and divided government do not have a statistically significant effect on midterm seat loss in the House when controlling for prior presidential vote, presidential popularity, and the state of the economy.

## CHAPTER FIVE: INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL ANALYSIS

The individual-level analyses sought to test variables that affected the probability of supporting a U.S. House candidate of the president's party. Vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives was specified as the dependent variable for each logistic regression. The first model pooled the six midterm elections from 1982 through 2002, utilizing the ANES cumulative data file. The second model tested vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2006 midterm elections. The third and fourth models tested variables affecting vote choice in the 2010 midterm elections. Data was obtained for these election analyses from the 2006 and 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES).

In addition to the logistic regression analyses, predicted probabilities for each election analysis are calculated in SPSS using the probability profile method. This is opposed to the sample averages method in which the variable of interest is manipulated while holding the other independent variables at their mean value. The purpose of these analyses is to measure, for example, how economic evaluations affect the vote choice of a Republican, Democrat, or Independent who approves (disapproves) of the president. As such, the effect of presidential evaluations on vote choice while holding party identification at its mean value is not of interest. In short, these analyses can show how economic and presidential evaluations affected the vote choice of both partisans and independents. Table 6 shows the number of voters that approved or disapproved of the president based upon their party identification.

Table 6: Presidential Evaluations and Party Identification of Voters

Party Identification and Presidential Evaluations	1982-2002	2006	2010
Presidential Party ID; Approve of the president	3,477	6,573	20,034
Presidential Party ID; Disapprove of the president	522	1,465	3,109
Opposition Party ID; Approve of the president	1,837	434	978
Opposition Party ID; Disapprove of the president	2,734	8,327	22,863
Independent; Approve of the president	659	481	1,783
Independent; Disapprove of the president	346	1,481	3,884

*Note: Presidential Party ID was Democratic in 1994, 1998, and 2010. It was Republican in 1982, 1986, 1990, 2002, and 2006. Opposition Party ID was Republican in 1994 and 1998. It was Democratic in 1982, 1986, 1990, 2002, and 2006. Independent voters are those who do not affiliate with nor lean towards the Democratic or Republican Parties. Data obtained from the ANES Cumulative data file (1982-2002) and the 2006 and 2010 CCES studies.*

As shown in table 6, in each election analysis, far more members of the president's party approved of his job performance than disapproved. The opposite held true for voters of the opposition party. In short, partisans tend to support the president of their party. Among independents, from 1982 through 2002, more of them approved rather than disapproved of the president. The opposite held true in 2006 and 2010. One reason could be the relative popularity of the presidents in the six midterms from 1982 through 2002. Only Ronald Reagan in 1982 and Bill Clinton in 1994 had approval ratings below 50% in any of these six midterms (Gallup 2013). In contrast, George W. Bush and Barack Obama were both unpopular in 2006 and 2010 with respective approval ratings of 39% and 45% (Gallup 2013). While most partisans approved of a president of their party and the presidential evaluations of independents differed in these three

election analyses, there are still sufficient numbers of partisans that disapprove of a president of their party. In short, there are voters whose party identification conflicts with their presidential evaluations. Measuring the effect that economic evaluations have on the predicted probabilities of each type of voter (in table 6) supporting a U.S. House candidate of the president's party is of interest.

### 1982-2002 Pooled Elections: Findings and Discussion

The ANES pooled analysis tested the effect of the following variables: presidential disapproval, sociotropic and egotropic economic evaluations (measured both retrospectively and prospectively), the presence of an open seat House race, and party identification, on a voter's likelihood of supporting a U.S. House candidate of the president's party in a midterm election.<sup>24</sup> Incumbency has clearly been demonstrated to increase the likelihood of a voter supporting a U.S. House candidate (Abramowitz 1975; Cover 1977; Jacobson 1981; Jacobson 1997). However, the absence of an incumbent, and, thus, an open seat U.S. House race, has not been tested as thoroughly. An expectation is that in open seat races, voters would be less likely to support the non-incumbent U.S. House candidate of the president's party, in part, because of the disadvantage that the presidential party theoretically faces simply for being in power (Erikson 1988). The logistic regression analysis for the 1982-2002 ANES pooled analysis is presented in table 7.

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<sup>24</sup> At different times in this chapter, the terms "independents" and "pure independents" will be used. Both of these refer to the same type of voter; an individual who does not identify with either the Democratic or Republican Party and does not claim to lean towards either party.



Table 7: Voting for the U.S. House Candidate of the President's Party: 1982-2002

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Presidential Disapproval	-.588***	.103
National economy worse in past year?	-.021	.112
National economy improved in past year?	.012	.120
Personal financial condition worse in past year?	.058	.117
Personal financial condition improved in past year?	.073	.109
Will the national economy worsen in next year?	-.144	.113
Will the national economy improve in next year?	.109	.111
Will personal financial condition worsen in next year?	.128	.143
Will personal financial condition improve in next year?	-.071	.104
Is the House race an open seat contest?	.107	.134
Does an individual have the same party identification as the president?	1.048***	.166
Does an individual have the same party identification as the opposition party?	-1.419***	.168
Constant	.097	.185
N	3,168	—
Change in -2LL	3,156.104	—
Cox-Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.310	—
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.416	—

\**p* < .10 \*\**p* < .05 \*\*\**p* < .01

The findings regarding presidential evaluations and party identification are largely intuitive. An individual who disapproved of the president was less likely than someone that approved to vote for the U.S. House candidate of the president's party. Compared to pure independents, an individual who identified with the president's party was more likely to support the U.S. House candidate of the president's party.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, individuals who identified with the opposition party were less likely to support the U.S. House candidate of the president's party as compared to independents.

In order to test the effect of presidential evaluations and party identification on the vote choice of both partisans and independents, predicted probabilities of voting for the U.S. House candidate of the president's party were calculated. These probabilities were calculated in SPSS utilizing the probability profile method. The reason for using this method was to measure how presidential evaluations influenced the vote choice of partisans (Democrats and Republicans) versus pure independents (voters that do not lean towards either party). In short, the objective was not to simply measure how party identification nor presidential evaluations separately affected vote choice. Rather, this research sought to measure how presidential evaluations affected vote choice depending on individuals' party identification (or lack thereof). These probabilities are listed in figure 1.

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<sup>25</sup> The president's party was Republican in 1982, 1986, 1990, and 2002. It was Democratic in 1994 and 1998. The opposition party was Democratic in 1982, 1986, 1990, and 2002 and Republican in 1994 and 1998.

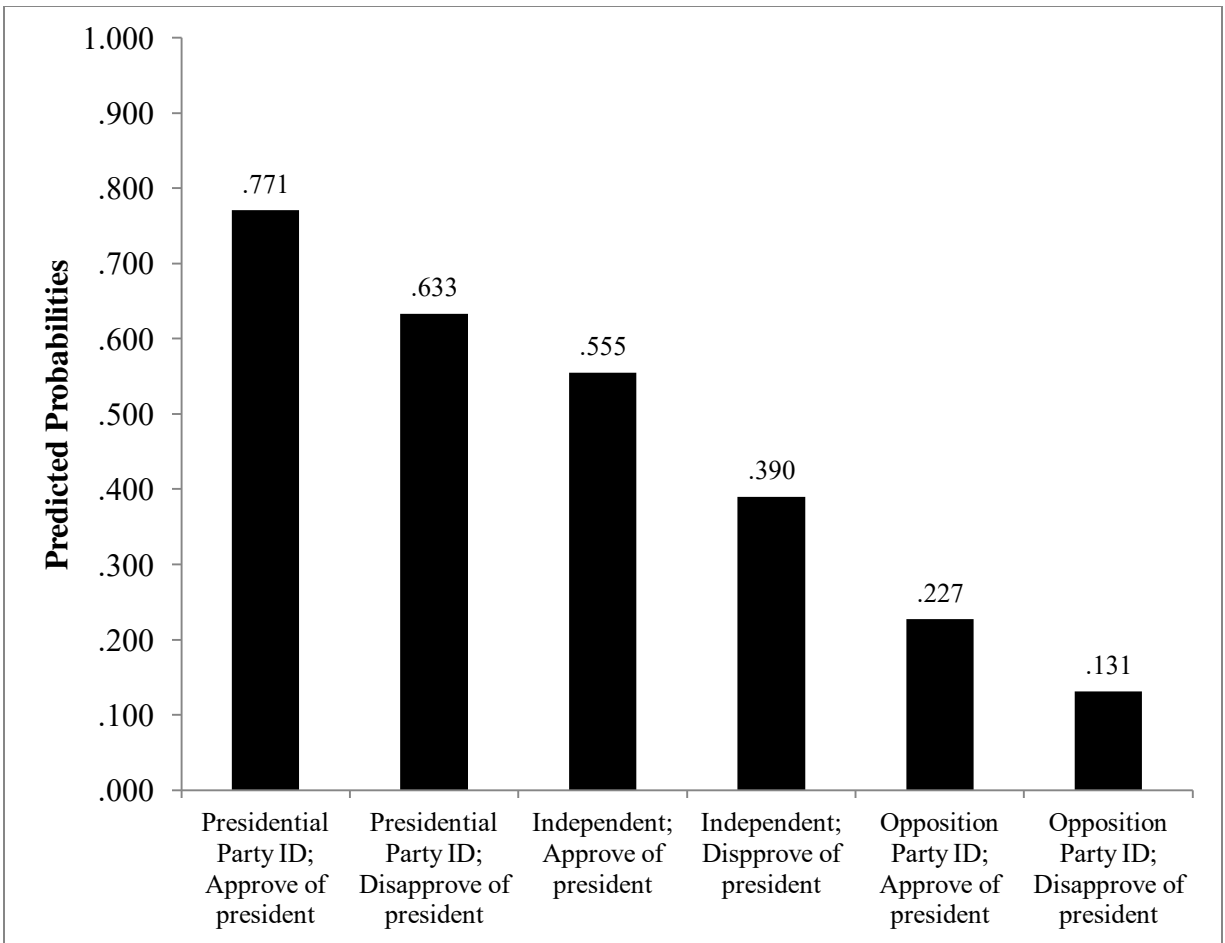


Figure 1: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for the U.S. House Candidate of the President's Party: 1982-2002 Pooled ANES Analysis

As shown in figure 1, individuals who identified with the same political party as the president and approved of his job performance were very likely to support the U.S. House candidate of the president's party, as evidenced by the predicted probability of .771. Sharing the same party identification as the president, but disapproving of him, a rare occurrence (see table 6), but nevertheless a possibility, decreased the probability of supporting the U.S. House candidate of the president's party by .138, from .771 to .633. However, even disapproval of the

president did not outweigh the power of party identification. Individuals who disapproved of the president, but shared his party identification, were still more likely than not to vote for the U.S. House candidate of their (and the president's) party. Findings were similar for partisans of the opposition party with individuals approving of the president, but identifying with the opposition still being quite unlikely (predicted probability of .227) to vote for the U.S. House candidate of the president's party.

Presidential evaluations had the strongest effect on the vote choice of pure independents. One reason for this could be because these individuals do not identify with a political party. As such, their vote choice is not measurably influenced by party identification. As party identification probably does not influence the vote choice of independents, it is certainly conceivable that presidential evaluations would have a stronger effect on their vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives. Presidential evaluations did indeed change independents' predicted probabilities, but the difference between approval and disapproval (of the president) for independents (.165) was not substantially larger than for individuals who shared the president's party identification (.138) and those with the same party identification as the opposition (.097). In short, presidential evaluations had a stronger effect on the vote choice of independents. However, based on the changes in predicted probabilities, presidential evaluations also affected the vote choice of partisans, implying that while party identification clearly had a strong effect on vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives, evaluations of the president mattered as well (Kernell 1977; Cover 1986).

The key findings of this analysis relate not to the effect of party identification and presidential evaluations, but to the lack of evidence and support for micro-level economic voting

in midterm U.S. House elections. These findings are synonymous with previous literature. Support for both pocketbook (egotropic) and sociotropic voting in U.S. House midterm elections is very limited in the literature with multiple scholars finding it does not affect voting behavior in midterm elections (Fiorina 1978; Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; Kramer 1983; Abramowitz 1985). Those scholars that have found support for individual-level economic voting in congressional elections (Romero and Stambough 1996; and Lockerbie 2008) tested vote choice in both on and off-year congressional elections. Support has been found for economic voting in presidential elections (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). However, when solely examining midterm elections (Abramowitz 1985; and Rudalevige 2001), there exists very little evidence to support economic voting at the individual level.<sup>26</sup>

Romero and Stambough (1996) used the ANES cumulative data file to pool the U.S. House elections of 1980 through 1988. In doing so, they found support for the previously unconfirmed pocketbook thesis, in which individuals' vote choice for the U.S. House is influenced by changes in their personal financial condition over the past year. However, their analysis was tested over both on and off-year congressional elections. In contrast, the pooled ANES analysis in this research tested only midterm elections. This analysis showed that neither sociotropic nor egotropic economic evaluations were statistically significant predictors of vote choice in the pooled analysis of the six U.S. House midterm elections from 1982 through 2002. Moreover, the coefficients were also quite small and were at times in the incorrect direction (in terms of their expected effect on vote choice). This implies that economic evaluations, whether

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<sup>26</sup> In order to further test the effect of economic evaluations, four additional models were run, separately testing the effect of: sociotropic retrospective, sociotropic prospective, egotropic retrospective, and egotropic prospective economic evaluations on vote choice. Whether these economic evaluations are tested separately or together, the coefficients for each are quite weak. In addition, none of these economic variables come close to having a statistically significant effect on vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives.

measured sociotropically, egotropically, retrospectively, or prospectively, do not affect vote choice in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. This runs contrary to Romero and Stambough (1996), but keeps with past literature (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; Hibbing and Alford 1981; Abramowitz 1985) that has found limited support for the effect of national and personal economic evaluations on vote choice for midterm U.S. House elections.

Logistic regression analyses were also conducted for the 2006 and 2010 midterm elections using data from the CCES. These analyses were largely similar, but the 2006 analysis included variables measuring whether the individual was familiar with the Democratic or Republican U.S. House candidates. There were no similar questions included in the 2010 CCES.

2006 Election: Findings and Discussion

Table 8: Voting for the Republican U.S. House Candidate in 2006

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Bush Disapproval	-1.727***	.061
National economy worse in the past year?	-.377***	.058
National economy improved in the past year?	.915***	.064
Is the House race an open seat contest?	.095	.076
Familiarity with the Democratic House candidate	-1.155***	.053
Familiarity with the Republican House candidate	1.099***	.057
Democratic Party identification	-1.267***	.066
Republican Party identification	1.070***	.069
Constant	.790	.101
N	21,701	—
Change in -2LL	13,529.566	—
Cox-Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.532	—
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.710	—

*\*p < .10 \*\*p < .05 \*\*\*p < .01*

The strongest determinants of vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2006 midterm elections were presidential disapproval, familiarity with the House candidates, and party identification. Voters' perceptions of an improved national economy over the past year influenced vote choice more so than their perceptions of a worse economy. Similarly to the ANES pooled analysis in table 7, the presence of an open seat House race registered a weak and statistically insignificant effect on vote choice. An open seat contest, and thus one without the

powerful voting cue of incumbency, did not make an individual any more or less likely to vote for the U.S. House candidate of the president's party, which was Republican in 2006. In contrast to the ANES pooled analysis, economic evaluations have a statistically significant effect on vote choice. These findings must be carefully interpreted, however, considering the very large sample size of the analysis ( $N = 21,701$ ). This large sample size could imply that the independent variables will be much more likely to attain statistical significance. As such, examining the predicted probabilities are more appropriate in determining the effect that economic evaluations had on vote choice for the U.S. House in 2006.

The only question regarding economic evaluations asked by both the 2006 and 2010 CCES related to sociotropic retrospective evaluations. This is individuals' answer as to how they viewed the national economy's performance in the year prior to the midterm election. Individuals that thought the national economy worsened over the past year were less likely to vote Republican for the House compared to an individual that thought that the national economy did not change over the past year. Individuals that perceived the national economy as having improved over the past year were more likely to vote Republican in 2006 than were individuals that thought the national economy remained the same. However, perceptions of an improving national economy had a stronger effect on the probability of supporting a Republican House candidate in 2006 than did perceptions of a worsening national economy.

In 2006, individuals who disapproved of President George W. Bush were less likely to vote Republican for the U.S. House as were individuals who approved of his job performance. Republicans were also more likely to support the Republican U.S. House candidate than were



pure independents. In contrast, Democrats were less likely to vote for the Republican U.S. House candidate as compared to pure independents.

In short, identifying with the Republican Party made individuals more likely to vote Republican for the House, while Democratic Party identification intuitively made individuals less likely to vote for the Republican House candidate. Familiarity and knowledge of U.S. House candidates also played a role in voting behavior. Individuals who had heard only of the Democratic House candidate were less likely to vote for the Republican House candidate. In contrast, individuals who were familiar only with Republican House candidate were more likely to vote for that candidate. While this variable did not show if either candidate was an incumbent, it does show the powerful effect that knowledge of a candidate can have on vote choice. (Abramowitz 1975; Jacobson 1997).

Table 8 showed that the following variables: disapproval of President Bush's job performance, perceptions of an improved national economy, familiarity with the U.S. House candidates, and party identification had the strongest effect on vote choice in the 2006 U.S. House midterm elections. Despite the very large sample size of the 2006 CCES, the variable for open seat House race did not attain statistical significance, similarly to the pooled midterm analysis in table 7. As such, this variable was not included in calculating predicted probabilities of voting for the Republican U.S. House candidate in 2006. Economic evaluations are included, along with the voters' familiarity of U.S. House candidates, presidential evaluations, and party identification in calculating predicted probabilities of voting for the Republican U.S. House candidate.

Again, the probability profile method was employed in calculating predicted probabilities. The objective in calculating predicted probabilities is to measure how the following independent variables: presidential evaluations, economic evaluations, and voters' familiarity with the U.S. House candidates, affect the vote choice of both partisans (Democrats and Republicans) and pure independents. These probabilities are presented in figure 2.

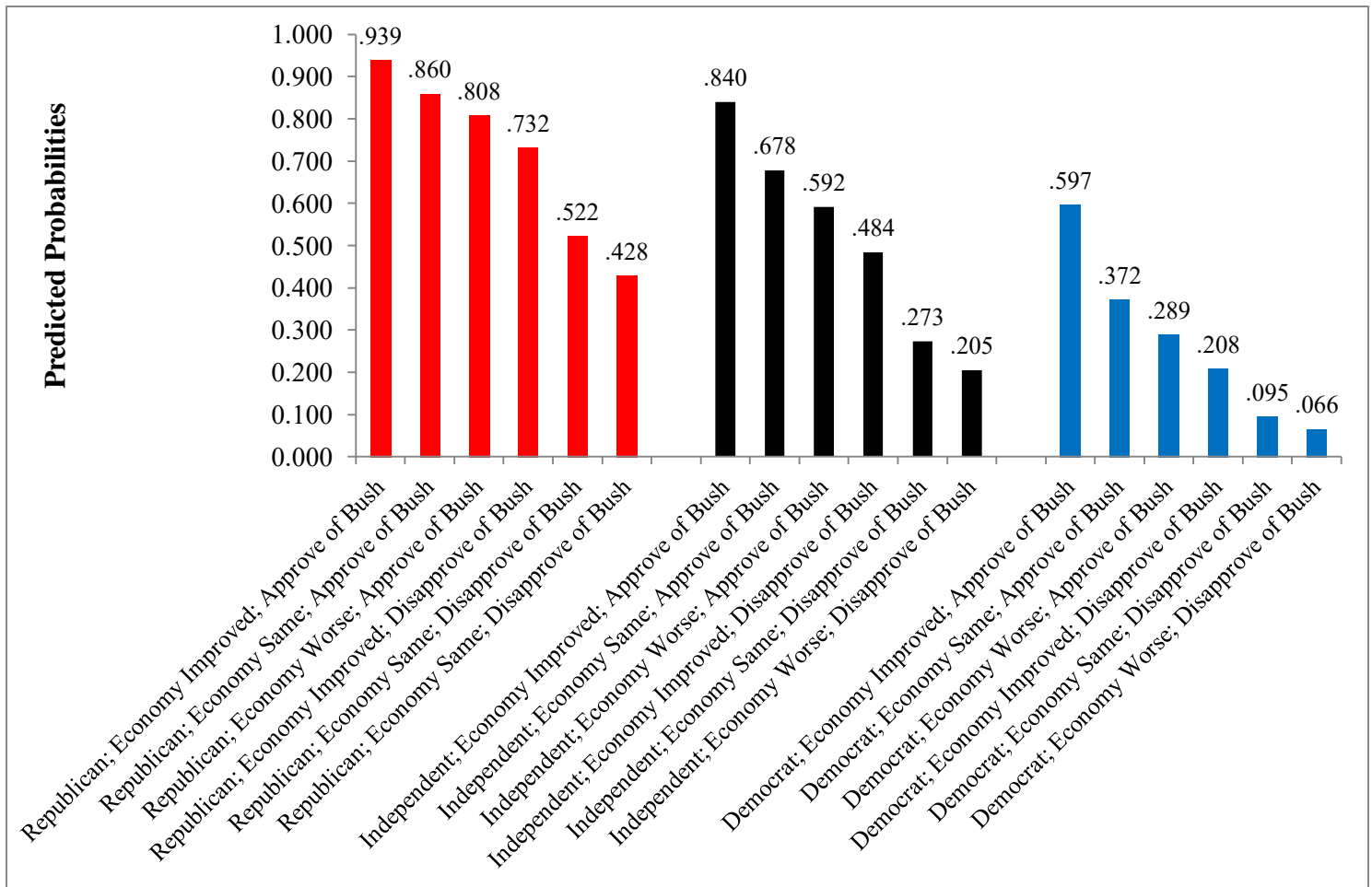


Figure 2: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for the Republican U.S. House Candidate in 2006: Effect of Presidential and Economic Evaluations

*Note: This analysis attempts to show how economic evaluations influence vote choice for both partisans and independents. Again, for purposes of limiting the number of categories, the assumption will be that individuals were familiar with and had contact with both U.S. House candidates.*

Figure 2 illustrates the influence of economic and presidential evaluations on vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006. A Republican who perceived the national economy as having improved in the past year, and approved of President George W. Bush, had a .939 predicted probability of voting for the Republican U.S. House candidate. However, if this same individual disapproved of President Bush, the predicted probability decreased to .732. For example, a Republican who approved of President Bush, but perceived the national economy as having worsened in the past year, had a .808 predicted probability of voting for the Republican U.S. House candidate. This increased to .860 and to .939 if a Republican who approved of Bush, perceived the national economy as having stayed the same or improved in the past year, respectively.

Regardless of economic evaluations, Republicans who approved of President Bush were very likely to vote for the Republican U.S. House candidate. Economic evaluations had a stronger effect on the vote choice of Republicans who disapproved (rather than approved) of Bush's job performance. The predicted probabilities of voting for the Republican U.S. House candidate were .522 and .428 for a Republican who disapproved of Bush and thought the national economy remained the same or worsened, respectively in the past year. However, if a Republican disapproved of Bush, but thought the national economy improved in the past year, the predicted probability of voting Republican for the U.S. House increased to .732. In short, evaluations of President Bush were very strong determinants of Republicans' vote choice in 2006. However, evaluations of the national economy (particularly of an improved one) also affected the voting behavior of Republicans.

While Republicans who approved of President Bush were very likely to vote for the Republican U.S. House candidate, Democrats who disapproved of him were very unlikely to do so. Even if a Democrat who disapproved of Bush thought the national economy improved the past year, their predicted probability of voting for the Republican U.S. House candidate was only .208. As was the case for Republicans that disapproved of President Bush, economic evaluations had a stronger effect on the vote choice of Democrats who approved (rather than disapproved) of him. For Democrats that approved of Bush, the predicted probability of voting Republican for the U.S. House increased based on economic evaluations, from .289 (worse), to .372 (same), to .597 (better). Among partisans, economic evaluations (particularly of an improved economy), had the strongest effect on vote choice when individuals' presidential evaluations conflicted with their party identification. In other words, when a Republican disapproved of Republican President George W. Bush or a Democrat approved of him.

In 2006, presidential evaluations were a strong determinant of vote choice for independents. An independent who approved of President Bush and thought the national economy improved in the past year had a very high predicted probability (.840) of voting Republican for the U.S. House. However, if an independent thought the national economy improved in the past year, but disapproved of Bush, the predicted probability decreased to .484. Presidential evaluations also affected the vote choice of independents who perceived the national economy as having remained the same (.678 vs. .273) or worsened (.592 vs. .205) respectively in the past year. Similarly to partisans, perceptions of an improved (as opposed to worsened) national economy had a stronger effect (in terms of changes in predicted probabilities) on the vote choice of independents. While economic evaluations did exert some influence on the vote

choice of independents, and were overall stronger (in terms of changes in predicted probabilities) than for partisans, independents who approved of President Bush were still more likely than not to vote Republican for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006. The opposite held true for independents who disapproved of his job performance.

An interesting finding is that the effect of economic evaluations (in terms of changes in predicted probabilities) was the strongest for partisans whose party identification conflicted with their presidential evaluation (e.g. a Republican who disapproved of Bush). These individuals' party identification could presumably make them more likely to vote for their party's U.S. House candidate, while their presidential evaluation (which conflicted with their party identification) could make them less likely to do so. This could imply that these individuals used economic evaluations as a means of mediating the conflict between presidential evaluations and party identification. In other words, economic evaluations may be used as a voting cue for individuals that experienced cognitive dissonance (Anderson, Mendes, and Tverdova 2004) as a result of conflicting party identification and presidential evaluations.

Party identification, presidential evaluations and, to a lesser extent, economic evaluations, were all shown to affect vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006. Figure 3 illustrates the effect that knowledge of the U.S. House candidates has on the vote choice of both partisans and independents in the 2006 midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. While the variable for candidate familiarity does not distinguish between U.S. House challengers and incumbents, it still shows how candidate familiarity affects the voting behavior of partisans and independents with differing evaluations of President Bush.

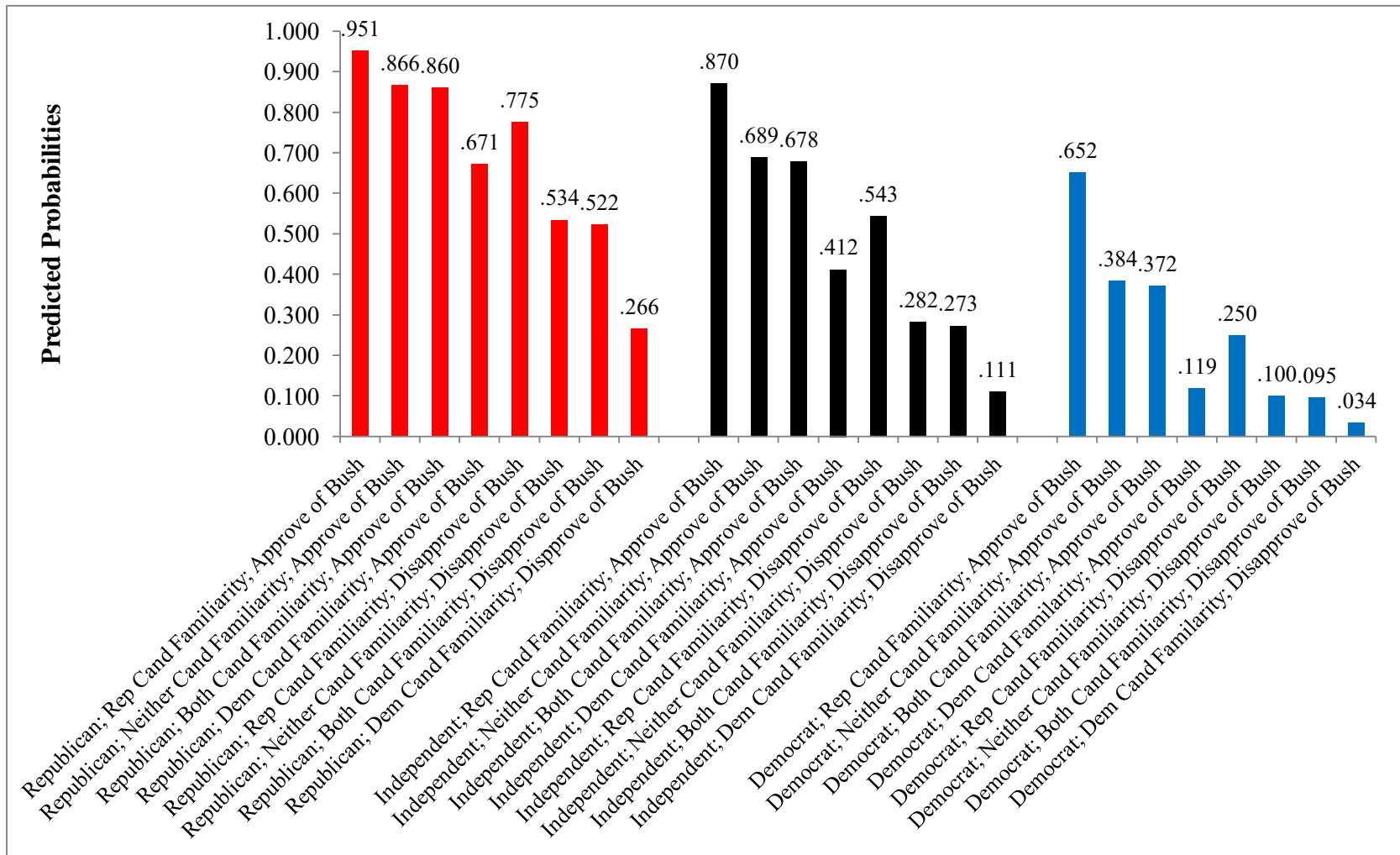


Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for the Republican U.S. House Candidate in 2006: Effect of Presidential Evaluations and Candidate Familiarity

*Note: This analysis attempts to show how U.S. House candidate familiarity influences vote choice for both partisans and independents. Again, for purposes of limiting the number of categories, the assumption will be that individuals thought the national economy stayed the same over the last year.*

In the 2006 U.S. House elections, candidate familiarity clearly affected vote choice, even when controlling for presidential evaluations and party identification. A Republican who approved of President Bush and was familiar with both U.S. House candidates had a very high predicted probability (.860) of voting for the Republican candidate. However, if this individual was only familiar with the Democratic U.S. House candidate, the predicted probability of supporting the Republican U.S. House candidate decreased to .671. In contrast, familiarity with the Republican House candidate can increase the predicted probability of voting Republican for the U.S. House, even if an individual disapproved of the president. A Republican who disapproved of Bush and was familiar with both candidates was slightly more likely than not to vote Republican for the U.S. House, with a predicted probability of .522. However, if this individual was only familiar with the Republican House candidate, the probability increased to .775, more than a three in four chance of voting for the Republican candidate, even though the individual disapproved of President Bush.

Democrats who were familiar with both U.S. House candidates, but disapproved of Bush had a very low predicted probability (.095) of voting Republican for the U.S. House. For Democrats who disapproved of Bush, but had heard only of the Republican U.S. House candidate, the predicted probability of voting Republican for the U.S. House increased to .250. In short, Democrats who disapproved of Bush were already quite unlikely to vote Republican for the U.S. House. Being familiar only with the Republican candidate only slightly increased an already very low predicted probability. The affect of candidate familiarity was strongest among Democrats who approved of President Bush. For example, Democrats who had not heard of either U.S. House candidate, but approved of President Bush, had a .384 predicted probability of



voting Republican for the U.S. House. However, if these individuals were familiar with only the Republican candidate, the predicted probability increased to .652. Implications are that, similarly to economic evaluations (figure 2); candidate familiarity had the strongest effect on the vote choice of conflicted partisans. In other words, the changes in predicted probabilities were largest among Democrats (Republicans) that approved (disapproved) of President Bush.

In contrast to partisans, there was not a large disparity for independents (in terms of differences in predicted probabilities) between approval and disapproval of President Bush. Independents who approved of Bush were quite likely to vote Republican for the U.S. House with a predicted probability of .678. However, for individuals who approved of Bush, familiarity with only the Democratic candidate had a stronger effect (in terms of changes in predicted probabilities) than did familiarity with only the Republican candidate. For example, the predicted probability increased by .192 to .870 if independents were only familiar with the Republican House candidate. It decreased by .266 to .412 if independents were only familiar with the Democratic House candidate. Findings were similar for independents who disapproved of President Bush, as familiarity only with the Republican candidate caused a greater change in the predicted probability of voting Republican for the U.S. House than did familiarity only with the Democratic House candidate. Implications are that for independents, candidate familiarity can influence vote choice, but the effect differed based upon evaluations of the president's job performance.

In summary, presidential evaluations had a strong effect on the vote choice of both partisans and independents. Republicans who approved of President Bush were quite likely to vote for the Republican U.S. House candidate irrespective of economic evaluations or familiarity

with the U.S. House candidates. The same held true for Democrats who disapproved of Bush. Perceptions of an improved national economy, which were stronger determinants of vote choice than were perceptions of a worse national economy (see table 8), had the strongest effect on the vote choice of conflicted partisans (Democrats that approved of Bush and Republicans that disapproved of him) and independents. The same was true for familiarity with the U.S. House candidates. For example, the vote choice of Democrats that disapproved of Bush (or Republicans that approved of him) was most affected (in terms of changes in predicted probabilities) by knowledge of only the Republican (Democratic) U.S. House candidate. The implications are that candidate familiarity is not a particularly powerful driver of vote choice when it simply reinforces individuals' existing presidential evaluations and party identification.

An hypothesis regarding the 2010 midterm elections is that economic evaluations were stronger determinants of vote choice for the U.S. House than in 2006. Indeed, following the 2008 financial crisis, the economy was no doubt in a weaker position heading into the 2010 midterm elections than it was in 2006.<sup>27</sup> As such, voter perceptions of the national economy may be more powerful drivers of vote choice in 2010. President Obama was also more popular in 2010 than was President Bush in 2006. Obama had a 45% approval rating, compared to Bush's 39% (Gallup 2013).

As demonstrated by Kernell (1977), presidential disapproval has a stronger effect on vote choice in midterm House elections than does presidential approval. Considering Obama's higher approval rating (as compared to Bush in 2006), presidential disapproval could have a weaker

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<sup>27</sup> In October 2006, the U.S. unemployment rate was 4.4%. In October 2010, two years after the 2008 financial crisis, the U.S. unemployment rate was 9.5%. Data regarding unemployment rates was gathered from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013).

influence on vote choice in 2010. However, as shown by Aldrich et. al (2012), identification with the Tea Party was closely linked with intense disapproval of President Obama. It is possible that disapproval of President Obama, as evidenced by the rise of the Tea Party, had a stronger influence on vote choice for the U.S. House in 2010 as compared to 2006. However, this is an empirical question that can be explored in part through the 2006 and 2010 CCES logistic regression analyses.

### 2010 Election: Findings and Discussion

Table 9: Voting for the Democratic U.S. House Candidate in 2010

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Obama Disapproval	-2.538***	.055
National economy worse in the past year?	-.764***	.055
National economy improved in the past year?	.306***	.075
Is the House race an open seat contest?	-.113	.075
Democratic Party identification	1.999***	.060
Republican Party identification	-2.056***	.061
Constant	1.640	.070
N	40,964	—
Change in -2LL	14,781.376	—
Cox-Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.637	—
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.853	—

*\*p < .10 \*\*p < .05 \*\*\*p < .01*

Presidential evaluations were actually stronger determinants of vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010 than in 2006. In terms of economic evaluations, in 2006, perceptions of an improved national economy exerted a stronger influence on vote choice in 2006, while perceptions of a worse economy were stronger determinants in 2010. While the 2006 CCES asked questions regarding both Democratic and Republican U.S. House candidate familiarity, the 2010 CCES did not distinguish between the two parties in measuring voter familiarity with U.S. House candidates. As such, the only variables included in calculating predicted probabilities of voting for the Democratic U.S. House candidate were presidential evaluations, economic evaluations, and party identification. Similarly to the ANES pooled analysis and 2006 CCES analysis, the predicted probabilities for the 2010 CCES analysis were calculated by the probability profile method in order to test the effects of presidential and economic evaluations on the vote choice of both partisans and independents. These probabilities are presented in figure 4.

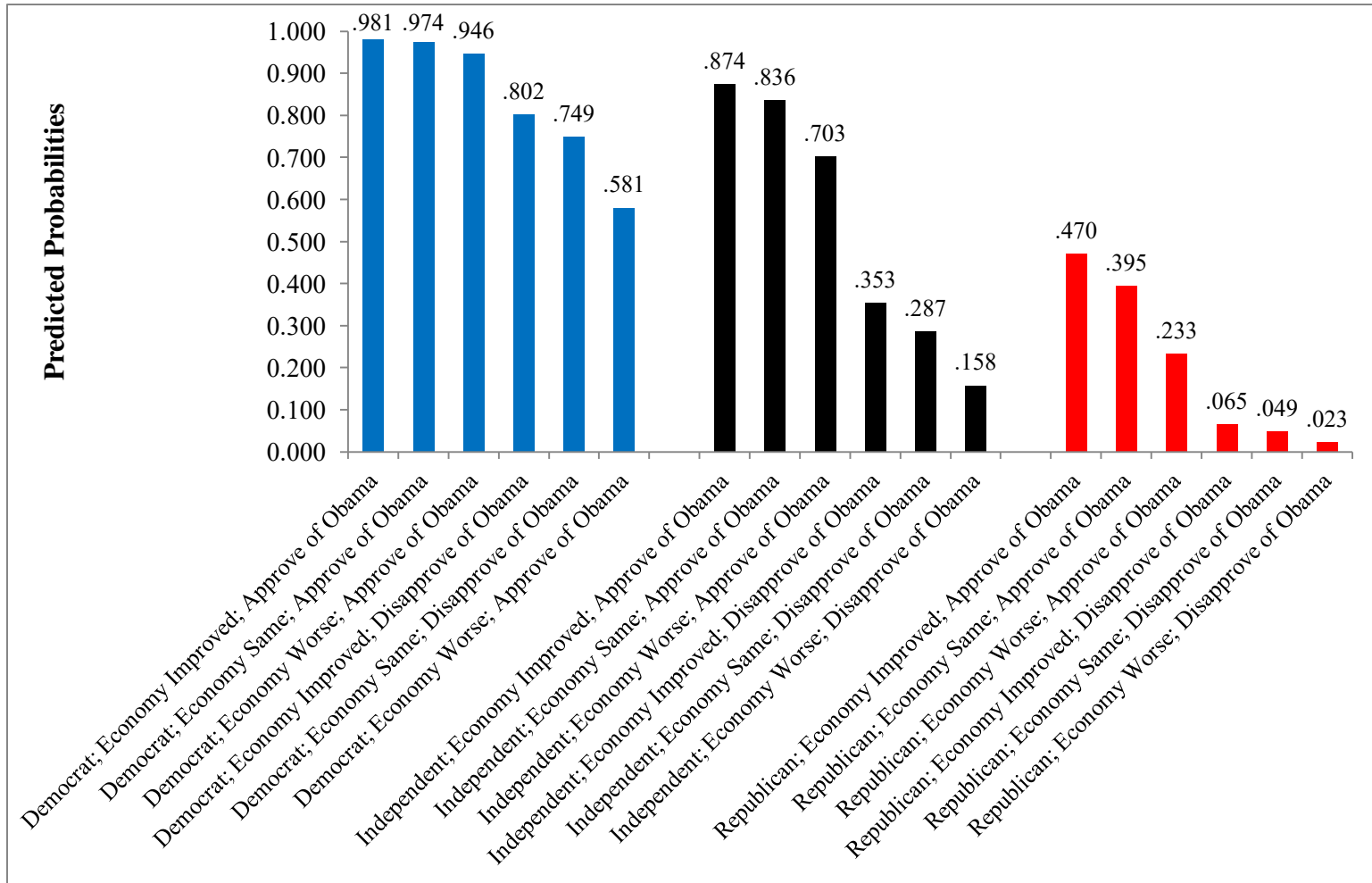


Figure 4: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for the Democratic U.S. House Candidate in 2010: Effect of Presidential and Economic Evaluations

The predicted probabilities of an individual's voting Democrat for the U.S. House, listed in figure 4, are similar to the predicted probabilities of voting Republican in 2006, shown in figures 2 and 3. Voters of the president's party (Democrat in 2010) were very likely to support the U.S. House candidate of that party. However, this probability varied depending on how an individual viewed the state of the economy and how they evaluated the president's job performance. In 2010, Democrats who approved of President Obama, and perceived the national economy as improved in the past year, had the highest predicted probability (.981) of voting for the Democratic U.S. House candidate. Economic evaluations, however, had very little effect on the vote choice of Democrats that approved of President Obama. The difference in predicted probability for perceptions of an improved national economy (.981) and a worse national economy (.946) were very small. The effects of economic evaluations were similar for Republicans that disapproved of President Obama. There was very little difference in the predicted probabilities for evaluations of a worse economy (.023), same (.049), or an improved economy (.065). This could imply that regardless of economic evaluations, presidential evaluations had a very powerful effect on vote choice for the U.S. House in 2010, even when controlling for party identification.

As was the case in 2006, economic evaluations had the strongest effect on the vote choice of conflicted partisans and independents. For example, a Democrat who disapproved of President Obama and thought the national economy remained the same in the past year had a .749 predicted probability of voting for the Democratic U.S. House candidate. That decreased to .581 if this individual thought the national economy had worsened in the past year. The changes in predicted probabilities are similar for Republicans. A Republican that approved of President

Obama and perceived the national economy as having improved in the past year had a .470 predicted probability of voting Democratic for the U.S. House. The probabilities decreased to .395 and .233 if a Republican thought the national economy remained the same or worsened in the past year, respectively.

As shown in table 9, perceptions of a worsened national economy in the past year had a stronger effect on vote choice for the U.S. House in 2010 than did perceptions of an improved national economy. This contrasted 2006, when perceptions of an improved national economy exerted a stronger influence on vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives.

Presidential evaluations influenced vote choice in both 2006 and 2010, but the effect was stronger in the latter. For example, in 2006, an independent that thought the national economy remained the same in the past year and approved of President Bush had a .678 predicted probability of voting Republican for the U.S. House. That probability decreased to .484 if an independent disapproved of Bush. In short, the difference in predicted probabilities between approval and disapproval was .405 (.678-.203). In 2010, that difference was .549 (.836-.287). Put simply, in 2010, presidential evaluations had a stronger influence on the vote choice for the U.S. House than in 2006.

Party identification also had a stronger influence on vote choice in 2010 as compared to 2006. As shown in figures 2 and 3, there were two scenarios in which a Democrat was more likely than not (predicted probability greater than .500) to vote Republican for the U.S. House of Representatives. The first occurred when a Democrat approved of Bush and perceived the national economy as having improved in the past year (predicted probability of .597). The second occurred when a Democrat who approved of Bush was only familiar with the Republican

U.S. House candidate (predicted probability of .652). While the 2010 analysis did not include measures of candidate familiarity, even among Republicans who approved of President Obama and perceived the national economy as having improved in the past year, the predicted probability of voting Democrat for the U.S. House was only .470. In short, party identification had a stronger effect on vote choice in 2010, perhaps implying a more polarized electorate in 2010 (Campbell 2011; Jacobson 2011) as compared to 2006. In other words, Democrats (Republicans) were more likely to vote Democrat (Republican) for the U.S. House in 2010 irrespective of presidential or economic evaluations.

Perhaps as a consequence of the very large sample size of the 2010 CCES, both variables measuring sociotropic retrospective economic evaluations attained statistical significance in table 9. As such, both economic variables were incorporated in calculating predicted probabilities of voting for the Democratic U.S. House candidate. In the analysis of the 2010 CCES MIT/Harvard module (table 10), a data set with a much smaller sample size, the variable for an improving national economy did not attain statistical significance. However, the variable measuring perceptions of a worsening national economy remained statistically significant at  $p < .01$ . This could imply that perceptions of a worse national economy over the past year did indeed influence vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010.



Table 10: Voting for the Democratic U.S. House Candidate in 2010: Harvard/MIT Sample

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Obama Disapproval	-2.495***	.238
National economy worse in the past year?	-1.103***	.230
National economy improved in the past year?	-.087	.330
Is the House race an open seat contest?	.017	.329
Democratic Party identification	2.257***	.266
Republican Party identification	-1.782***	.268
Constant	1.701	.415
N	2,225	—
Change in -2LL	797.456	—
Cox-Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.640	—
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.855	—

*\*p < .10 \*\*p < .05 \*\*\*p < .01*

Aside from the disparity in sample size, the main difference between the full 2010 CCES sample (see table 9) and the smaller Harvard/MIT sample (table 10) relates to economic evaluations, particularly perceptions of a national economy that worsened in the past year. The coefficients for Obama disapproval, open seat House contest, and party identification remained similar (in terms of their magnitude and direction) and retained essentially the same levels of statistical significance. However, the coefficient for a worsened national economy increased in strength from -.764 to -1.103. In contrast, the coefficient for an improved national economy decreased substantially from .306 to -.087. It also failed to remain even close to a level of statistical significance. This could imply that perceptions of a worsened national economy did indeed influence vote choice in the 2010 midterm elections for the U.S. House of

Representatives. This would run contrary to past scholarship which has found little support for sociotropic economic voting in midterm House elections (Fiorina 1978; Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; Abramowitz 1985). Figure 5 included this variable along with party identification and presidential evaluations in calculating individuals' predicted probabilities of voting Democratic for the U.S. House of Representatives.

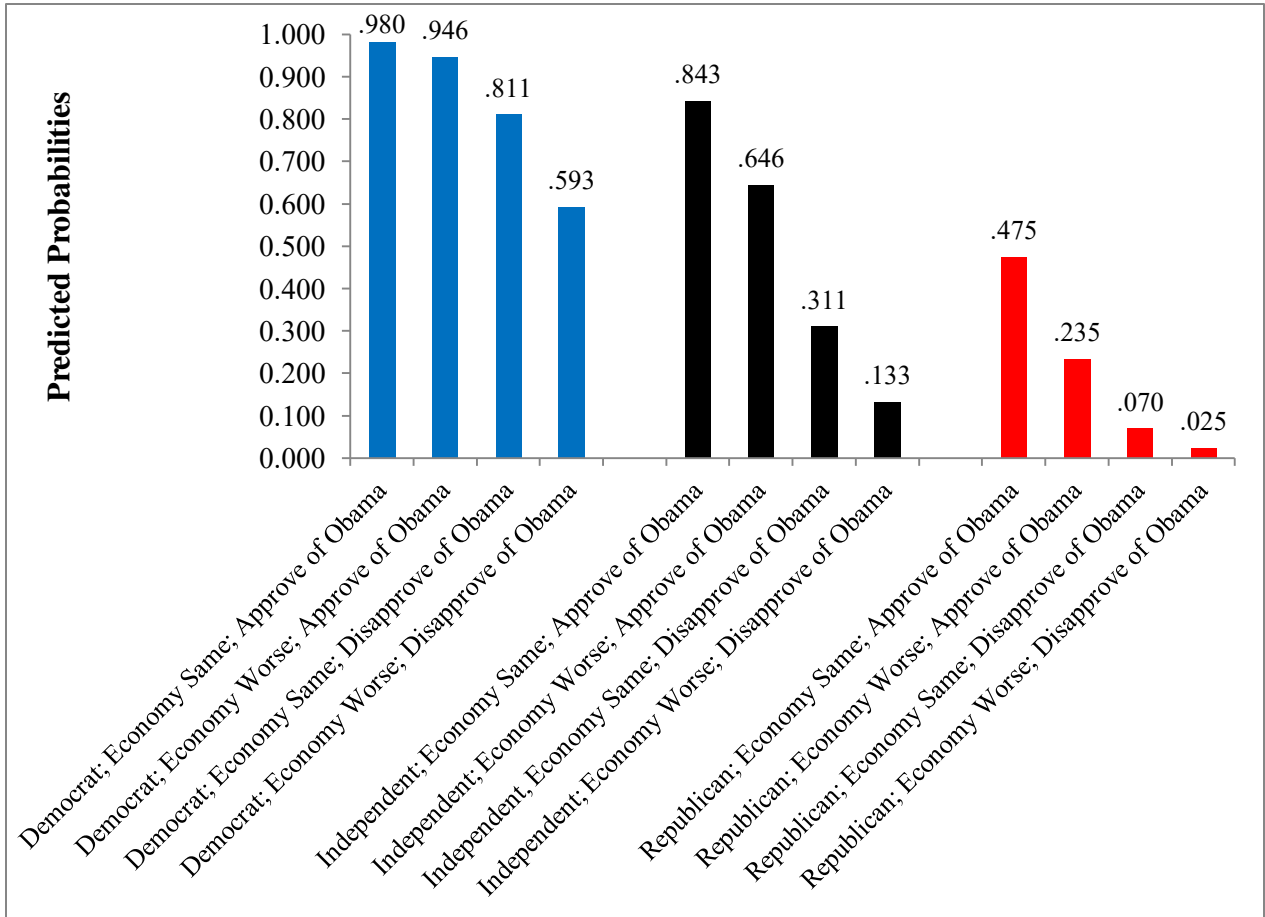


Figure 5: Predicted Probabilities of Voting for the Democratic U.S. House Candidate in 2010: Harvard/MIT Sample

*Note: The Harvard/MIT 2010 CCES sample asked the same questions as the full Common Content 2010 CCES. However, the sample size (3000 vs. 55,000) is much smaller. As shown in table 10, only the variables for a worse national economy over the past year was included in calculating predicted probabilities as perceptions of an improved economy did not attain statistical significance.*

The coefficients and predicted probabilities remained similar in both logistic regression analyses of the 2010 CCES. Democrats were quite likely to vote for a Democratic U.S. House candidate while Republicans were quite unlikely to do so. Presidential evaluations had a very strong effect on vote choice in the 2010, particularly for independents. For example, an independent who thought the national economy stayed the same in the past year and approved of President Obama, had a predicted probability of .843 for voting Democratic for the U.S. House of Representatives. Disapproval of President Obama, however, lowered the predicted probability of an independent voting Democratic for the U.S. House of Representatives to just .311.

Perceptions of a worsened national economy over the past year also affected vote choice. The effects were stronger for conflicted partisans and independents as compared to Democrats that approved or Republicans who disapproved of President Obama. However, the effects were very weak for Democrats who approved, and Republicans who disapproved of President Obama. The predicted probability of voting Democrat for the U.S. House of Representatives decreased to .946 from .980 when a Democratic individual thought the national economy worsened (as opposed to remained the same) in the past year. For Republicans who disapproved of Obama, the differences in predicted probabilities were also quite minimal .025 (worsened economy in the past year) to .070 (same economy in the past year). The implications are that economic evaluations were not strong enough to outweigh the combined effects of party identification and particularly presidential evaluations, on vote choice in the 2010 midterm elections.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### Aggregate-Level Conclusion and Implications

In updating and building upon Campbell's (1985) model of midterm seat loss, this research has shown that the economy does indeed have a statistically significant effect on the magnitude of seat loss for the president's party in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. It has also rejected the explanatory power of presidential party, exposure, the number of uncontested House races, and divided government. Findings imply that, contrary to Coleman (1997), Republican presidents are not advantaged at the midterm simply for being Republicans. Coleman suggested that voters may have higher expectations from Democratic presidents in terms of legislative success and economic growth and will, thus, punish Democratic presidents more harshly if they fail to meet voters' lofty expectations. Thus Republican presidents theoretically have a much lower threshold to meet in order to satisfy the electorate. The analysis, however, largely rejected this idea, finding that presidents of both parties can be punished or rewarded at the midterm.<sup>28</sup>

This aggregate research did show that the Republican Party is generally advantaged at the midterm as compared to the Democratic Party. However, it is not due simply to presidential party. Rather the Republican Party's midterm advantage is due to the decline in Democratic Party identification (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Meffert, Norpoth, and Ruhil 2001) fueled in part by the realignment of the South (Campbell 1997a; Black and Black 2002). Post-1982, Republican presidents will see their party advantaged at the midterm as compared to Democrats,

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<sup>28</sup> Coleman (1997) included presidential party as both a dummy variable and interaction term with: prior presidential vote, presidential popularity, and GNP growth. While not included in this analysis, the inclusion of presidential party as an interaction term with similar variables could be another area of future research.

gaining approximately 13 additional U.S. House seats on average. In short, as the Democratic Party's previously overwhelming advantage in party identification has declined, the Republican Party will enjoy an advantage in midterm elections at the aggregate level. Including this variable into a model of midterm seat loss that controls for both surge and decline and referendum can provide for a more accurate prediction of seat loss in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives.

This realignment diminishes the Democratic Party's prospects of regaining control of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2014. While Republican presidents (post-1982) will see their party advantaged in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives, Democratic presidents will be comparatively disadvantaged. As shown in model 5 (see table 3), the aggregate-level model that included realignment along with prior presidential vote share, presidential popularity, and the economy was the most accurate in terms of average seat loss prediction error and adjusted  $R^2$  (.715). Predictions for the 2014 midterm U.S. House elections are presented below in table 11.

Table 11: Seat Loss Predictions for the 2014 Midterm U.S. House Elections

Scenarios	Prior Vote Share	Presidential Approval Rating	Economy	Democratic Seat Loss	Republican Seat Loss
Retake the House	52%	84%	4.0%	17	30
Above Average	52%	55%	3.0%	-20	-7
Average	52%	53%	2.0%	-26	-12
Below Average	52%	45%	1.5%	-37	-24

*Note: An “above average” scenario is one in which, for example, President Obama’s approval rating entering the midterm was above the average rating of 53% and the growth of the economy (in terms of real disposable income per capita) was above the average of 2.0%.*

In 2012, Barack Obama won reelection with 52.0% of the national two-party vote share. As such, this number is unchanging in each scenario. An average scenario for 2014 is one in which President Obama’s approval rating is the same as the average for each president in the fall of the 17 midterm elections from 1946 through 2010. This approval rating was 53%. Average economic growth in the year prior to each midterm from 1946 through 2010 was 2.0%. As shown in row three of table 11, the Democratic Party would lose, according this model, 26 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. In the above average scenario, Democratic seat loss would decrease to 20 while in the below average scenario, it would increase to 37. This table also shows what the seat loss predictions would be for a Republican president under the same scenario. For example, a President Mitt Romney with an average approval rating (53%) and

presiding over average economic growth (2.0%) would see the Republican Party lose only 12 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. This advantage (as compared to the Democratic Party) is due in part to a realignment of the electorate, particularly in the South, toward the Republican Party. Disparities are similar for the above average and below average scenarios in which Romney's Republicans would lose only 7 and 24 seats while Obama's Democrats would lose 20 and 37, respectively.

This realignment, along with the fact that since 1946, only Bill Clinton in 1998 and George W. Bush in 2002 saw their respective party gain seats in a U.S. House midterm election, does not bode well for the Democratic Party in 2014. Assuming the economy is among the strongest it has been in a midterm election since 1946 (4.0% growth in real disposable income per capita), President Obama would need an astronomically high approval rating of 84% in order to net his party the 17 seats that it needs to regain a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. Even under this very optimistic scenario, the Democrats would then only attain a one seat majority of 218-217. In short, the prospects of a Democratic House majority in 2014 appear quite unlikely.

Unlike the variable for realignment, divided government, exposure, and the number of uncontested House races did not have a statistically significant effect on seat loss for the president's party. Divided government came closest with a t-statistic of 1.648 and p-value of .125. In 1946, under a period of divided government, Harry Truman's Democrats lost 54 seats and the U.S. House majority. While Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson did not lose (or gain) the House majority, both suffered severe seat losses of 48 and 47 in 1958 (divided government) and 1966 (unified government) respectively. Under periods of divided government, the



Republicans lost 47 seats, while the Democrats lost 54 seats and the majority in 1974 and 1994, respectively. In short, the president's party has endured substantial midterm seat losses under both unified and divided government.

While the coefficient for divided government came close to attaining statistical significance, the same was not true for exposure and the number of uncontested House races. Even when operationalized as the average number of House seats the president's party held in the four prior elections to the midterm election (differently than the original authors of the exposure thesis), exposure did not have a substantial nor statistically significant effect on the magnitude of seat loss for the president's party in U.S. House midterm elections.<sup>29</sup> For example, the average number of Republican U.S. House seats held in the four prior U.S. House elections (both on and off-year) to the 2006 midterms (226) had no effect on the fact that George W. Bush's Republican Party lost 30 U.S. House seats in 2006. This analysis lends further support to Campbell's (1997b; 124-126) argument that the exposure thesis is largely capturing the events of the past presidential elections and that when tested solely over midterm elections (as opposed to both on and off-year elections), does not affect the magnitude of seat losses for the president's party in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The number of uncontested House races, drawn in part from Wrighton and Squire (1997), was hypothesized to have a negative effect on the magnitude of seat losses for the president's

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<sup>29</sup> Oppenheimer, Stimson, and Waterman (1986) measured exposure as the number of House seats held by the Democratic Party in comparison to its equilibrium. This equilibrium number was calculated by measuring the average number of Democratic House over held in both on and off-year congressional elections from 1938 through 1984. Exposure is calculated by subtracting the aforementioned equilibrium number of Democratic House seats from the number of House seats the Democratic Party held prior to the congressional election.

party. In other words, the higher the number of uncontested House races for the president's party, the less seats there should be to defend and, thus, a lower number of seat losses should occur. As shown by Wrighton and Squire (1997), the number of uncontested Democratic House seats had decreased, while the number of uncontested Republican seats has decreased. This is due in part to the fact that the Republican Party has gradually begun to contest Southern U.S. House races (Black and Black 2002; McKee 2010). The analysis, however, showed that the number of uncontested races (nationwide) for the president's party had no effect on the number of seats lost at the midterm.

#### Individual-Level Conclusion and Implications

The individual-level analyses tested the effect of: presidential evaluations, economic perceptions, the presence of an open seat U.S. House race, candidate familiarity, and party identification, on vote choice in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. The effects of these variables were tested in both a pooled ANES analysis and singular analyses of the 2006 and 2010 midterm elections. The pooled analysis, drawn from the ANES cumulative data file, was able to test the effects of four types of economic evaluations: sociotropic retrospective, egotropic retrospective, sociotropic prospective, and egotropic prospective.

In a pooled analysis using the ANES cumulative data file from 1980 through 1988, Romero and Stambough (1996) found support for the previously-unconfirmed pocketbook voting thesis. However, their analysis incorporated both on and off-year congressional elections. This research, which pooled only midterm elections, contradicted their findings. While pocketbook voting may exist in presidential elections and congressional elections occurring in presidential

election years (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; Lockerbie 2008), the same is not true in midterm elections. The ANES pooled analysis also found that neither sociotropic nor egotropic economic evaluations (measured retrospectively or prospectively), had a statistically significant effect on vote choice in U.S. midterm House elections. This could lend further support to Kramer (1983) and Lockerbie (2008) who argued that unless voters attribute economic conditions to government policies, these variables will not affect individuals' vote choice in congressional elections.

In the 2006 and 2010 CCES, only measures of sociotropic retrospective evaluations (the performance of the national economy in the past year) were available and thus were the only economic variable included in the analysis. Evidence supporting the effect of this variable on vote choice was mixed. The 2006 CCES analysis (N = 21,701) demonstrated that both worsened and improved sociotropic retrospective economic evaluations had a statistically significant effect on vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives. The effect of the latter, however, was stronger than the former in 2006. The opposite was true in the 2010 midterms. Analysis of the full 2010 CCES (N = 40,964) showed, similarly to the 2006 analysis, that both perceptions of a worsened and improved national economy had a statistically significant effect on vote choice. However, their effects (particularly for improved sociotropic evaluations), were much weaker than were those of presidential evaluations and party identification. In 2010, evaluations of President Obama were the strongest driver of vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The smaller Harvard/MIT analysis (N of 2,225) also showed that presidential evaluations and party identification were powerful and statistically significant drivers of vote choice. Similarly to the ANES pooled analysis as well as the full 2006 and 2010 CCES analyses, the

presence of an open seat U.S. House contest did not make an individual any more or less likely to vote against the candidate of the president's party. In short, voters are not inclined to punish a non-incumbent U.S. House candidate simply because they are a member of the party in control of the presidency. Variables measuring contact with both the Democratic and Republican U.S. House candidates were only available in the 2006 CCES. This analysis clearly showed that familiarity with candidates, be it one, both, or neither, affects the vote choice of both partisans and independents.

Based on the 2006 and 2010 CCES analyses, perceptions of an improved (2006) and worsened (2010) national economy influences vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives. Control of the federal government was unified under the Republicans and Democrats in 2006 and 2010, respectively. As such, responsibility for the state of the economy could be easier for individuals to attribute (Nicholson and Segura 1999; Rudolph 2003). Thus, it would presumably be easier for voters to credit the Republicans for a strong economy in 2006 and to blame the Democrats for a weak economy in 2010. This could be one possible explanation as to why these variables appeared to affect vote choice for the U.S. House of Representatives. As Norpoth (2001) demonstrates, however, even under divided government, voters will attribute responsibility for the economy to the president and will not allocate responsibility equally between Congress and the executive. Considering the dissonance in the literature regarding blame attribution, this could be an area of future research. Quantitative examination of how divided government affects the vote choice of individuals in midterm elections, could demonstrate if, for example, voters will be less likely to vote for the U.S. House candidate of the

president's party if the candidate is a member of the minority (as opposed to the majority) party in the U.S. House of Representatives.

### Future Research

Regarding the aggregate-level findings relating to the southern realignment on seat loss in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives, future research could move to the individual level. A regional analysis of voting behavior could be of interest. Analyses of how variables such as presidential approval, economic evaluations, incumbency, and candidate familiarity affect vote choice in midterm elections among individuals from the South as compared to the Midwest, Northeast, or the West could help test for example, whether a popular Democratic president presiding over a booming economy, and a party that recruits quality candidates could overcome the Republican Party's recent strength in U.S. House elections in the South (McKee and Hayes 2008, McKee 2010).

Future research can certainly include direct measures of U.S. House Representative incumbency, as opposed simply controlling for the lack of incumbency (an open seat U.S. House contest). In short, voters may be less influenced by party identification and presidential and economic evaluations when controlling for the incumbency status of U.S. House candidates.

Future research can also incorporate the strategic politician thesis (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). At the aggregate level, a measure of the number of quality candidates for the president's party (candidates who have held prior elected office) could be incorporated into a model that tests: surge and decline, referendum, and the realignment of the South.

Future research could turn to state legislative, gubernatorial, and senatorial elections. These analyses could build on research by Campbell (1986) who focused on the effect of withdrawn presidential coattails on state legislative seat losses, Holbrook-Provow (1987), and Abramowitz and Segal (1986) who studied how presidential popularity and the economy influenced gubernatorial and senatorial election outcomes, respectively. While elections for the upper chamber receive comparatively less empirical research (Lockerbie 2008), it is certainly plausible that similar variables affect seat loss and vote choice for the president's party in midterm elections for both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Future research could also focus on vote choice for the U.S. Senate at the individual level. Indeed, the large sample size of the CCES can be beneficial in studying vote choice in U.S. Senate elections. Data is disaggregated by state, thus allowing for analyses of multiple state-wide elections without sacrificing the sample size. Research could be similarly conducted for gubernatorial elections.

To conclude, this analysis has shown that presidential popularity affects both seat loss and vote choice in midterm elections. At the aggregate level, the economy does affect seat loss, as does the realignment of the South. At the individual-level, party identification clearly influences vote choice, as does U.S. House candidate familiarity. Evidence relating to individual-level economic evaluations is mixed at best, although perceptions of an improved and worsened national economy influenced vote choice in the 2006 and 2010 midterm elections, respectively. Party identification, the economy, familiarity with U.S. House candidates, and evaluations of the president are all important factors in explaining why the president's party consistently endures setbacks in midterm elections for the U.S. House of Representatives.

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