Ten Stories About Election '06

What You Won't Learn From the Polls

Released November 6, 2006

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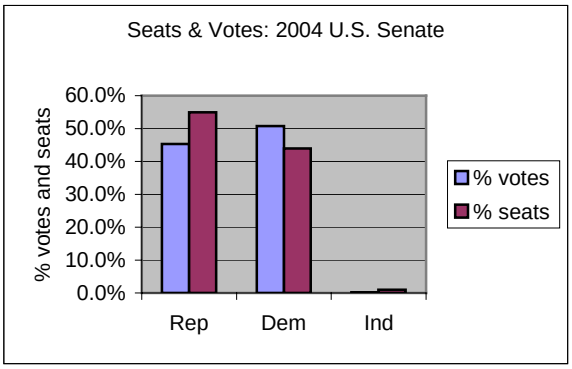
What Do Votes Have to Do With It?

Democrats' Probable National Majorities May Not Result in Control of Congress

On November 7, Americans will elect all 435 Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and 34 U.S Senators. Due to the malapportionment required by the U.S. Constitution for Senate elections and the vagaries of single-member district, winner-take-all elections for the House, it is quite possible that Democrats will win clear majorities of the national popular vote in races for both the House and Senate – on the order of 53% to 47% - but not majorities of seats in either body.

Minority Rule in the U.S. Senate



Republicans currently hold 55 out of 100 seats in the Senate, yet Democrats won 51% of all votes cast in Senate races in 2000-2004. By contrast, the Republican majority rested on 45% of votes, with the rest to independents. Nationally, it took 725,828 votes to elect a Republican and 1,017,050 to elect a Democrat.

In 2006, Democrats are favored to sweep to big margin victories in most big state Senate races and gain seats overall. But, once again, their likely popular vote majority in Senate races from 2002-2006 may not translate into a majority of seats. When states have two senators regardless of size, it is easy to have such a disconnection.

Minority Rule in the U.S. House of Representatives

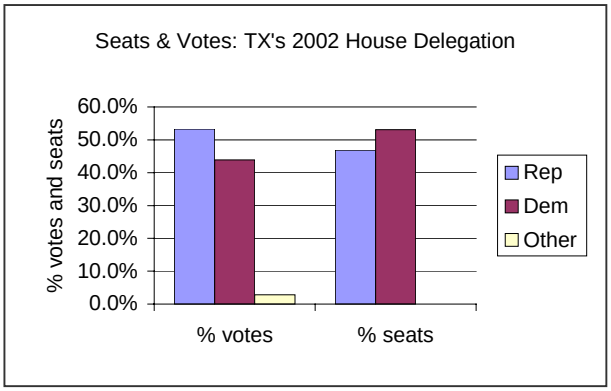
The popular vote majority party also can lose the chamber in U.S House races. In 2006, for example, Democrats are widely expected to win the national two-party vote – both because of national poll preferences and because they are running more than 30 more House candidates than Republicans. But if Democrats only win a slim majority of the national House vote, they almost certainly will fail to win a majority of House seats. Indeed, they likely will fall short of a seat majority even if winning close to 53% of the two-party vote.

One reason is the simple power of incumbency: when your opposition party starts off with more incumbents who typically run 5% to 8% above the partisan projection in their districts, you are at a disadvantage. But an even bigger reason is our partisan geography. Democratic voters are more likely to be geographically concentrated in urban and suburban areas and as a result live in more naturally 'packed' districts. By contrast, Republican voters are more efficiently distributed for the purpose of winning congressional seats. Thus, George Bush could lose the national popular vote in 2000, but carry 47 more of the 2002 congressional districts – a pattern of Republican advantage that in fact was even more pronounced in the 1970s, when far greater ticket-slitting concealed its impact. As another measure, the average margin of victory in 2004 in a Democratic-held district was 45% points as contrasted with 37% points for winning Republicans.

Examples from the states

In 2004, Connecticut Democratic candidates won a 55% majority of votes statewide. Republicans took just over 44%. Despite a comfortable majority for Democrats, the state's delegation is majority Republican.

Texan Republicans experienced their own "wrong winner" election in 2002 when, despite accounting for over 53% of votes in U.S. House races, they won only 15 of 32 seats. Democrats won a 17-seat majority with under 44% of votes.



Monopoly Politics 2006

How by Thursday We Will Project Election '08 Winners in 340+ Races

On the morning of November 9, 2006 – two days after the mid-term congressional elections – FairVote will issue its projections for winners and electoral margins in the great majority of U.S. House races to be held fully two years later, in November 2008. Even though our projection model represents cautious estimates that reflect how poorly an incumbent might do if he or she has a difficult year (meaning most incumbents will win by greater margins than our cautious projections for them), we expect to be able to project winners in more than 340 U.S. House seats and project landslide wins of at least 20% in nearly half of all seats. Even in fiercely competitive years in which control of the House is in doubt, more than 80% of incumbents can essentially run on cruise control.

We will use the same methodology that has had an accuracy rate of 99.8% in projecting winners in more than 1,600 races from 1996-2004. Based on the history of our success, the candidates we project to win are almost certain to win if they choose to run in 2008, with the only wildcards being their potential involvement in a high-profile personal scandal or a strong swing in the two-party national vote toward the opposition party (note that our spreadsheet allows one to easily adjust the two-party vote to find out what shift would be required to put them into a no-projection category).

Here's our history of making such bold projections. In July 1997, FairVote first released *Monopoly Politics*, the first in a series of bi-annual reports that project the outcome of most U.S. House races based on a simple, but powerful observation: the partisan division in most districts usually determines the winner of elections, particularly when combined with a history of strong incumbent performance. In the great majority of U.S. House races, we can project not only who will win but by what margin without knowing a single thing about:

- the identity of their next challenger;
- the incumbent's voting record or other behavior during their tenure;
- campaign spending in past or current elections;
- district-specific polling data and organizational endorsements.

All we need to know are the results from recent federal elections in the district and the incumbent's party and seniority. Each *Monopoly Politics* report provides state-by-state, district-by-district guides to races. The history of elections in each district is included, and winners and victory margins are predicted in the great majority of House races. Our methodology was adapted by analyst Charlie Cook for his well-known "partisan voting index" (PVI) measurement of districts.

Because we lack the presidential election data by district immediately after congressional elections held at the same time as presidential elections, our projections for mid-term congressional elections are delayed until that data is available. But after mid-term elections, the only new data we need to make projections is the incumbent's performance in that mid-term election. Heading into 2008, therefore, the only changes we will make after November 9, 2006 are: (1) final official election results by district, which occasionally can affect a projection; (2) whether the seat becomes open, which then triggers projections based on the district partisanship without regard to past congressional candidate performance in the district; (3) whether the district lines are changed, as took place in Texas in 2003 and Georgia in 2005; and (4) and the projected two-party national division in the next election, which automatically changes projections in all races.

Our predictions of winners in House elections have been remarkably accurate since we launched the model. Although there likely were slight deviations from a 50-50 partisan division in some of those elections – a slight advantage for Democrats in 1998, for example, and a somewhat bigger advantage for Republicans in 2002 – we have evaluated our projections based on a 50-50 vote. During that period, we have projected winners in 1,613 races. Of these projected winners, 1610 (99.8%) indeed did win the seat. Although two of the three errors were in 2004 (Republican Phil Crane's defeat in Illinois and Democrat John Salazar's open seat win in Colorado), our projections for landslide winners were remarkably accurate that year: of the 211 races we projected would be won by landslide margins of 20%, all but two were in fact won by that margin. Indeed the most striking trend in our analysis has been the increase in seats projected to be won and won easily – a trend that has closely tracked a general decline in competitiveness in elections.

See the following chart for more details. Note that for 2006 we have three different listings, based on three different potential two-party results: ones where Democrats win 50%, 53% and 56% of the two-party vote, respectively.

Projections*	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006 50-50%	2006 53%D	2006 56%D
Landslide	148	176	191	195	211	236	206	196
Comfortable	103	92	86	100	107	95	100	82
Win	37	44	53	37	33	23	40	36
Total wins	288**	312	330	332	351**	354	346	314
Competitive	138	121	101	86	70	68	66	76
Vulnerable	9	2	4	17	14	12	23	45
Total other	147	123	105	93	84	80	89	121
Total Seats	435	435	435	435	435	435	435	435

* 1996-2000 projections made retroactively after converting to a new spreadsheet-driven model in 2002

** One of our projected winners lost in 1996. Two lost in 2004. All the others won their elections.

The Untouchables

U.S. House Members Who Simply Cannot Be Unseated without Personal Scandal

Very few U.S. House races are truly competitive, and 2006 is sure to continue this pattern even in the midst of a potential swing toward Democrats of more than 20 seats and the first change in partisan control of the House since the 1994 elections. Just how non-competitive are our elections? In each of the past four congressional elections, from 1998-2004, more than 98% of incumbents have won, and more than 90% of all races have been won by margins of over 10%. In 2002, only four incumbents were defeated by non-incumbent challengers in the general election: the fewest in history.

Our report *Dubious Democracy 2005* provided a comprehensive assessment of the level of competition and accuracy of representation in U.S. House elections in all 50 states from 1982 to 2004. It ranked each state on a "democracy index" based on average margin of victory, difference in points between seats and votes, how many voters elect winning candidates and number of House races won by overwhelming landslides. Some highlighted national facts include:

- **Sky-high incumbency rates**: Only five incumbents lost to challengers in 2004 – the second lowest number in our nation's history, just behind 2002. Nearly nine in ten incumbents were re-elected by "landslide" margins of at least 20 percent.

- **Landslides**: In 14 states in 2004, every race was won by a landslide margin of at least 20 percent. Only four states (all with fewer than three seats) recorded no landslide wins.

- **High victory margins**: The average victory margin was a whopping 40 percent. Seven of every eight (83%) U.S. House races were won by landslide margins of at least 20 percent in 2004. Only 23 races (5%) were won by competitive margins of less than 10 percent.

- **Apathy:** Nearly one out of every 11 voters skipped over their House race on the ballot. Despite a surge in turnout due to the presidential race, more than 62 percent of eligible voters – nearly two in three – did not vote for a winning House representative.

Additionally, the report included alarming statistics from nearly every state in the "facts in focus" section. Here are just a few "lowlights:"

- **Florida**: Incumbents won 139 of 140 House races in Florida from 1992-2004. Of 25 House races in 2004, 24 (96%) were won by landslide victory margins of at least 20%.

- **Massachusetts**: Of the state's 30 House races from 2000-2004, 16 were completely uncontested. Six more were won by at least 40%, and eight were won by at least 20% landslides. The state's 65% overall margin of victory in House races was the nation's largest; seven incumbents have won their last four races by landslides.

- **Arizona:** Voters adopted a redistricting reform proposal in 2000 that established a commission to draw district lines, yet competition actually decreased in the state elections from 2002-2004. Fifteen of 16 U.S. House races in these two elections were won by landslide margins of at least 20%, including four races by more than 40%.

- **California**: 51 of the 53 House races held in 2004 were won by landslide margins that exceeded 20%. Of the 101 incumbents who ran for re-election in 2002 and 2004, all were re-elected, and 99 of these 101 incumbents won by landslides.

Given the dramatic re-election success of incumbents, incumbency could be seen as the overriding factor for determining electoral outcomes. From 1998 to 2004, of 1,594 incumbents seeking re-election, only 27 (1.7%) lost. Almost all of these defeated incumbents had one of three things in common: lack of seniority; representing a district that tilted toward the other party; or being targeted in redistricting, which indeed was responsible for more than half of the 15 incumbent defeats that took place in House elections in 2002 and 2004.

Incumbency certainly helps, but one reason incumbents win is they usually represent districts that match their partisanship. Take the Republican freshman class of 1994. Of the 34 Republicans who defeated Democratic incumbents, eight were defeated from 1996-2000. Most of those eight losers represented districts that would clearly favor Democrats in an open race. None of the victorious 1994 challengers in the more safely Republican districts were defeated. Clearly the most entrenched incumbents are very settled in districts that would be safe for any candidate from their party.

On the following pages is a list of incumbents whom FairVote labels “untouchable”: they have won by landslide margins of at least 20% in both 2002 and 2004 and represent a district that tilts 5% or more in their party’s favor.

Member	Party	State	CD	2004 Winning %	2002 Winning %
Ackerman, Gary L.	D	New York	5	71%	93%
Aderholt, Robert B.	R	Alabama	4	75%	87%
Akin, W. Todd	R	Missouri	2	65%	67%
Andrews, Robert E.	D	New Jersey	1	75%	93%
Baca, Joe	D	California	43	66%	66%
Bachus, Spencer	R	Alabama	6	99%	90%
Baker, Richard H.	R	Louisiana	6	72%	84%
Baldwin, Tammy	D	Wisconsin	2	63%	66%
Bartlett, Roscoe G.	R	Maryland	6	67%	66%
Barton, Joe	R	Texas	6	66%	70%
Becerra, Xavier L.	D	California	31	80%	81%
Berman, Howard L.	D	California	28	71%	71%
Bernice-Johnson, Eddie	D	Texas	30	93%	74%
Blumenauer, Earl	D	Oregon	3	71%	67%
Blunt, Roy	R	Missouri	7	70%	74%
Boehner, John A.	R	Ohio	8	69%	71%
Bono, Mary	R	California	45	67%	65%
Brady, Kevin	R	Texas	8	69%	93%
Brady, Robert A.	D	Pennsylvania	1	86%	86%
Brown, Henry E., Jr.	R	South Carolina	1	88%	90%
Burton, Dan	R	Indiana	5	72%	72%
Buyer, Steve	R	Indiana	4	69%	71%
Calvert, Ken	R	California	44	62%	63%
Cannon, Chris	R	Utah	3	63%	67%
Cantor, Eric I.	R	Virginia	7	75%	70%
Capuano, Michael E.	D	Massachusetts	8	99%	100%
Clay, William Lacy, Jr.	D	Missouri	1	75%	70%
Clyburn, James E.	D	South Carolina	6	67%	67%
Coble, J. Howard	R	North Carolina	6	73%	90%
Conyers, John, Jr.	D	Michigan	14	84%	83%
Cox, Christopher	R	California	48	65%	68%
Crenshaw, Ander	R	Florida	4	100%	100%
Crowley, Joseph	D	New York	7	81%	73%
Culberson, John Abney	R	Texas	7	64%	89%
Cummings, Elijah E.	D	Maryland	7	73%	74%
Davis, Danny K.	D	Illinois	7	86%	83%
Davis, Jo Ann S.	R	Virginia	1	79%	100%
Davis, Susan A.	D	California	53	66%	62%

Member	Party	State	CD	2004 Winning %	2002 Winning %
Deal, Nathan	R	Georgia	10	100%	100%
DeGette, Diana	D	Colorado	1	73%	66%
Delahunt, William D.	D	Massachusetts	10	66%	69%
DeLauro, Rosa L.	D	Connecticut	3	72%	66%
Diaz-Balart, Lincoln	R	Florida	21	73%	100%
Dingell, John D.	D	Michigan	15	71%	72%
Doggett, Lloyd	D	Texas	25	68%	84%
Doolittle, John T.	R	California	4	65%	65%
Doyle, Mike	D	Pennsylvania	14	100%	100%
Duncan, John J., Jr.	R	Tennessee	2	79%	79%
Ehlers, Vernon J.	R	Michigan	3	67%	70%
Emerson, Jo Ann	R	Missouri	8	72%	72%
Engel, Eliot L.	D	New York	17	76%	62%
Eshoo, Anna G.	D	California	14	70%	68%
Everett, Terry	R	Alabama	2	71%	69%
Farr, Sam	D	California	17	67%	68%
Fattah, Chaka	D	Pennsylvania	2	88%	73%
Flake, Jeff	R	Arizona	6	79%	66%
Frank, Barney	D	Massachusetts	4	78%	100%
Frelinghuysen, Rodney P.	R	New Jersey	11	68%	72%
Gallegly, Elton	R	California	24	63%	65%
Gilchrest, Wayne T.	R	Maryland	1	76%	77%
Gillmor, Paul E.	R	Ohio	5	67%	67%
Gonzalez, Charles A.	D	Texas	20	65%	100%
Goode, Virgil H., Jr.	R	Virginia	5	64%	64%
Goodlatte, Robert W.	R	Virginia	6	97%	100%
Granger, Kay	R	Texas	12	72%	92%
Graves, Samuel B., Jr.	R	Missouri	6	64%	63%
Green, Gene	D	Texas	29	94%	95%
Gutierrez, Luis V.	D	Illinois	4	84%	80%
Harman, Jane	D	California	36	62%	61%
Hastings, Alcee L.	D	Florida	23	100%	77%
Hastings, Doc	R	Washington	4	63%	67%
Herger, Wally	R	California	2	67%	66%
Hinchey, Maurice D.	D	New York	22	67%	64%
Hobson, Dave	R	Ohio	7	65%	68%
Hoekstra, Peter	R	Michigan	2	69%	70%
Honda, Mike	D	California	15	72%	66%
Hoyer, Steny H.	D	Maryland	5	69%	69%

Member	Party	State	CD	2004 Winning %	2002 Winning %
Hulshof, Kenny C.	R	Missouri	9	65%	68%
Hunter, Duncan	R	California	52	69%	70%
Issa, Darrell	R	California	49	63%	78%
Jackson, Jesse L., Jr	D	Illinois	2	88%	82%
Jackson-Lee, Sheila	D	Texas	18	89%	77%
Jefferson, William J.	D	Louisiana	2	79%	86%
Johnson, Sam	R	Texas	3	86%	74%
Johnson, Timothy V.	R	Illinois	15	61%	65%
Jones, Walter B., Jr.	R	North Carolina	3	71%	91%
Kaptur, Marcy	D	Ohio	9	68%	74%
Kildee, Dale E.	D	Michigan	5	67%	92%
Kilpatrick, Carolyn Cheeks	D	Michigan	13	78%	92%
Kingston, Jack	R	Georgia	1	100%	72%
Kucinich, Dennis J.	D	Ohio	10	60%	74%
LaHood, Ray	R	Illinois	18	70%	100%
Langevin, James R.	D	Rhode Island	2	75%	76%
Lantos, Tom	D	California	12	68%	68%
Larson, John B.	D	Connecticut	1	73%	67%
Lee, Barbara	D	California	9	85%	81%
Levin, Sander M.	D	Michigan	12	69%	68%
Lewis, Jerry	R	California	41	83%	67%
Lewis, John	D	Georgia	5	100%	100%
Lewis, Ron	R	Kentucky	2	68%	70%
Linder, John	R	Georgia	7	100%	79%
Lofgren, Zoe	D	California	16	71%	67%
Lowey, Nita M.	D	New York	18	70%	92%
Lucas, Frank D.	R	Oklahoma	3	82%	76%
Maloney, Carolyn B.	D	New York	14	81%	75%
Markey, Edward J.	D	Massachusetts	7	74%	100%
McCrery, Jim	R	Louisiana	4	100%	72%
McDermott, Jim	D	Washington	7	81%	74%
McGovern, James P.	D	Massachusetts	3	70%	100%
McKeon, Howard P.	R	California	25	64%	65%
McNulty, Michael R.	D	New York	21	71%	75%
Meehan, Martin T.	D	Massachusetts	5	67%	60%
Meeks, Gregory W.	D	New York	6	100%	96%
Millender-McDonald, Juanita	D	California	37	75%	73%
Miller, Gary G.	R	California	42	68%	68%
Miller, George	D	California	7	76%	71%

Member	Party	State	CD	2004 Winning %	2002 Winning %
Moran, Jerry	R	Kansas	1	91%	91%
Myrick, Sue Wilkins	R	North Carolina	9	70%	72%
Nadler, Jerrold L.	D	New York	8	81%	74%
Napolitano, Grace F.	D	California	38	100%	71%
Neal, Richard E.	D	Massachusetts	2	99%	100%
Norwood, Charlie	R	Georgia	9	74%	73%
Olver, John W.	D	Massachusetts	1	99%	68%
Pallone, Frank, Jr.	D	New Jersey	6	67%	67%
Pascrell, Bill J., Jr.	D	New Jersey	8	69%	67%
Pastor, Ed	D	Arizona	4	70%	67%
Paul, Ron	R	Texas	14	100%	68%
Payne, Donald M.	D	New Jersey	10	97%	85%
Pelosi, Nancy	D	California	8	83%	80%
Pence, Mike	R	Indiana	6	67%	64%
Peterson, John E.	R	Pennsylvania	5	88%	87%
Petri, Tom	R	Wisconsin	6	67%	100%
Pickering, Charles W., Jr.	R	Mississippi	3	80%	64%
Pitts, Joseph R.	R	Pennsylvania	16	64%	88%
Platts, Todd	R	Pennsylvania	19	91%	91%
Portman, Rob	R	Ohio	2	72%	74%
Price, David E.	D	North Carolina	4	64%	61%
Putnam, Adam H.	R	Florida	12	65%	100%
Radanovich, George	R	California	19	66%	67%
Rangel, Charles B.	D	New York	15	91%	87%
Rehberg, Dennis	R	Montana	1	64%	65%
Reyes, Silvestre	D	Texas	16	68%	100%
Rogers, Harold	R	Kentucky	5	100%	78%
Rohrbacher, Dana	R	California	46	62%	62%
Rothman, Steven R.	D	New Jersey	9	68%	70%
Roybal-Allard, Lucille	D	California	34	74%	74%
Royce, Ed	R	California	40	68%	68%
Rush, Bobby L.	D	Illinois	1	85%	81%
Schakowsky, Janice D.	D	Illinois	9	76%	70%
Schiff, Adam B.	D	California	29	65%	63%
Scott, Robert C.	D	Virginia	3	69%	100%
Sensenbrenner, F. James, Jr.	R	Wisconsin	5	67%	87%
Serrano, Jose E.	D	New York	16	95%	92%
Shadegg, John B.	R	Arizona	3	80%	67%
Sherman, Brad	D	California	27	62%	62%

Member	Party	State	CD	2004 Winning %	2002 Winning %
Sherwood, Don	R	Pennsylvania	10	93%	93%
Simpson, Michael K.	R	Idaho	2	71%	68%
Slaughter, Louise M.	D	New York	28	73%	62%
Smith, Lamar S.	R	Texas	21	61%	73%
Solis, Hilda L.	D	California	32	85%	69%
Souder, Mark E.	R	Indiana	3	69%	63%
Stark, Fortney Pete	D	California	13	72%	71%
Stearns, Clifford B.	R	Florida	6	64%	65%
Tauscher, Ellen O.	D	California	10	66%	76%
Terry, Lee	R	Nebraska	2	61%	63%
Thompson, Mike	D	California	1	67%	64%
Thornberry, William 'Mac'	R	Texas	13	92%	79%
Tiahrt, Todd	R	Kansas	4	66%	61%
Tierney, John F.	D	Massachusetts	6	70%	68%
Towns, Edolphus	D	New York	10	91%	98%
Tubbs-Jones, Stephanie	D	Ohio	11	100%	76%
Udall, Mark	D	Colorado	2	67%	60%
Udall, Tom	D	New Mexico	3	69%	100%
Velazquez, Nydia M.	D	New York	12	86%	95%
Visclosky, Peter J.	D	Indiana	1	68%	67%
Walden, Greg	R	Oregon	2	72%	72%
Wamp, Zach	R	Tennessee	3	65%	65%
Waters, Maxine	D	California	35	81%	77%
Watt, Melvin L.	D	North Carolina	12	67%	65%
Waxman, Henry A.	D	California	30	71%	70%
Weiner, Anthony D.	D	New York	9	71%	65%
Weldon, Dave	R	Florida	15	65%	63%
Wexler, Robert	D	Florida	19	100%	72%
Whitfield, Edward	R	Kentucky	1	67%	65%
Wicker, Roger F.	R	Mississippi	1	79%	71%
Woolsey, Lynn	D	California	6	73%	66%
Wynn, Albert Russell	D	Maryland	4	75%	79%
Young, Don	R	Alaska	1	71%	75%

The Gerrymander and Money Myths

The Real Roots of Non-Competition & GOP Advantage

After four decades of control of the U.S. House of Representatives, usually by overwhelming margins, some Democrats may have developed a sense of entitlement about running the House. When Republicans took control in the 1994 elections, it was not hard for these Democrats to point their fingers at culprits other than themselves for their defeats, including alleged Republican advantages won in redistricting and strategic campaign spending or untrustworthy voting machines. These perceptions were fueled by reformers eager to seize on an opportunity to make their case for reform. Some showcased data that suggested money determines the outcomes in more than 90% of House races, while others focused on how new techniques for partisan gerrymandering were the biggest contributing factor to declines in electoral competition and increases in the general Republican advantage.

There is an element of truth to these claims. Certainly our antiquated mechanics of running elections result in literally millions of lost votes in national elections, congressional candidates would rather have more money to spend than less, and partisans would not wage such bitter political and legal fights over redistricting if they did not recognize its power to affect electoral outcomes. But FairVote challenges the underlying argument that either campaign spending or gerrymandering is the major reason for either the remarkable levels of non-competition in U.S. House races or for recent Republican advantages.

It's not the money: Our intensive examination of the 2000 election cycle

Because winning House races is strongly correlated with campaign spending and outspending one's opponent, in particular, some observers are quick to mistake cause for effect when it comes to money's place in U.S. House elections. Money flows to candidates for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with helping them win elections; in fact, many of the biggest campaign donors prefer to give to candidates whom they expect to win, as certain winners are a better investment for those wanting future access to address policy concerns. Of course, in today's heated battle for control of Congress, competitive races draw more attention from donors on both sides of the partisan divide. As FairVote demonstrated in 2002, the result is that winning percentages in House races are actually negatively correlated with the campaign spending by both winners and losers. In other words, as a candidate spends more and more money, he or she tends to win by smaller and smaller amounts.

For indications that much money isn't being given just to defeat candidates of another party, take two examples from 2000: Pennsylvania-9's Bud Shuster, who spent more than $1.1 million that year, and Arkansas-3's Asa Hutchison, who spent more than $800,000. Their spending levels were above average but otherwise unremarkable – except that both candidates were uncontested and won election with 100% of the vote, safely ensconced in districts secure for their party. Clearly, in these and many other cases, their contributors were betting on a sure thing.

On the other hand, there are many races where the candidates spent similar amounts, but the winner won by more than 20%. Examples from 2000 included Steve Buyer (IN-5), whose opponent spent over $400K compared to Buyer's $330K; Patsy Mink (HI-2), where both candidates spent around $200K; and Tom Allen (ME-1), where Allen and his opponent spent a little more than $350K.

There were three House races that year in which both candidates spent more than $2 million. The candidate who spent more money lost two out of three. Four out of the top five biggest spending losers outspent their opponents. Ten candidates spent more than $2 million in 2000. Five won, and five lost. Of the five losers, four of them outspent their opponents but lost anyway. If spending really determined the outcome of every race – not just who won but by how much – then one would expect to find competitive races when candidates spend similar amounts and lopsided races when one candidate outspends the other. This turns out not to be the case. Instead, the winner and winning percentage is far more closely correlated with the partisanship of the district, which is determined long before candidates start raising and spending money. Here are more examples from the 2000 elections:

- NC-3: Republican Walter Jones, Jr. and his opponent both spent about $1.1 million, yet Jones crushed his opponent with 61% of the vote. Without using any information on campaign finance, our model projected that Jones would win with at least 60%.

- IN-3: Democrat Tim Roemer was outspent by his Republican opponent by more than $250,000 but won with 52% of the vote, within 1% of our projection.

- OK-6: Republican Frank Lucas was outspent by his Democratic opponent yet ended up within 2% of our projection and won by over 18%.

If money doesn't determine the outcome of races as much as the fundamental political landscape of voters, some might suggest that media coverage does. To show that this is not the case in most Congressional elections, consider two adjacent districts with very different partisan compositions. Two such districts are AL-6 (Spencer Bachus) and AL-7 (Earl Hilliard). Voters in these two districts were exposed to identical media coverage of the presidential election, yet Bill Clinton in 1996 received 45% more of the vote in Hilliard's district than in Bachus' district. Four years later, with two very different candidates and presumably different strategies in the state, Al Gore won 44% more of the vote in Hilliard's district than in Bachus'. Just like their party standard-bearers, in each of their last 4 elections, both Bachus and Hilliard won with landslide margins of over 40%, just as our model predicts based on the partisanship of the district.

Finally, although outspending one's opponent is certainly associated with winning elections and winning percentage, the association between winning percentage and partisan prediction is much tighter than between winning percentage and the winner's spending ratio in the 2000 open seat races for which we were able to obtain campaign finance data for both candidates.

It's not gerrymandering: The roots of non-competition run far deeper

With rising rates of incumbent retention, lopsided elections and the visceral impact of the Texas re-redistricting in 2003 suggesting to Democrats that Republicans can steal elections through gerrymandering, redistricting processes have drawn increasing attention from reformers and editorial writers. But the bracing reality is that political gerrymandering in 2001-2 only had a minimal impact on overall lack of competition and is not the root cause of the bias toward Republicans that exists in congressional districts. Consider these points:

1. Our elections have been non-competitive for decades, starting well before modern tools of gerrymandering emerged and even before states regularly redistricted at the start of a decade. In 1956, for example, 96% of incumbents won and 95.4% of seats stayed in the same party's hands; indeed at least 88% of incumbents won in every election since 1952, including 99% in 1968, 97% in 1976 and more than 98% in both 1986 and 1988 – years when more than 85% of all incumbents won by margins of more than 20%.

2. It is true that we are in the midst of the least competitive congressional elections in history, and certainly one can measure specific means by which certain incumbents were protected in 2001-2002. But the great majority of incumbents did not need nor receive any help in redistricting. As the chart at the end of this analysis shows, the great bulk of districts were changed by less than 2.5% in partisanship in post-2000 redistricting – 207 out of 326 that we analyzed. Another 77 districts had their partisanship shift by between 2.5% and 5.5%, but only 42 districts were changed by more than 5.5%, which is the only kind of change that alone could turn a competitive race into a landslide win. Yet even in these 42 districts, only 27 of the partisan shifts in redistricting helped the incumbent party.

3. The sharpest decline in competition occurred after the 1996 elections, when no redistricting was happening. The combination of the Cold War ending in 1989, Bill Clinton winning the presidency in 1992 and Republicans taking over the House in 1994 led to a hardening of partisan voting patterns in federal races that contributed to the Republican win in 1994 and a modest Democratic comeback in 1996. But by 1998, the field of play was generally set, with a sharp decline in incumbents representing the opposition party's district. That year, one in which the impeachment of Bill Clinton only further polarized the country, only six House incumbents lost, and fewer than 10% of races were won by less than 10%. We have experienced single-digit incumbent defeat numbers ever since, and the number of races won by less than 10% have never dropped to fewer than nine in ten races. It is true that redistricting typically would have created an upward blip in competition in 2002, but even such a temporary increase in competitive races would have had a minor impact on the overall problem of lack of voter choice.

4. The same dramatic drop in competition has taken place in states in presidential contests decided by the Electoral College – moving from 24 states being in a swing state position in 1976, representing 345 electoral votes, to just 13 similarly defined swing states representing 159 electoral votes in 2004. State

lines of course are not redrawn, and major party presidential candidates have great access to the media and to campaign dollars – but none of those factors have stopped the decline in competitive states. FairVote's report *Presidential Election Inequality*, available in hard copy and on-line at www.fairvote.org/presidential, helps shows just how and why this has occurred.

5. Republicans have a definitive edge in the number of districts their presidential candidate carries in a nationally even year, but that edge has in fact declined since the 1970s. Their past advantage was obscured by the fact that so many House Democrats before 1994 were able to represent Republican-leaning districts, but a single-member district's bias against the party whose support is more concentrated is nothing new. See the chart at the end of this factsheet.

Redistricting commissions won't help with competition

Even if commissions typically are a worthy reform to address the conflict of interest that comes with politicians helping their political friends and hurting their enemies, independent redistricting alone will never achieve a complete set of worthy public interest goals at the same time: competitive elections, partisan fairness, racial fairness, geographic coherence and accountable leadership.

Competition, for example, requires districts with a narrow partisan division, which in turn almost certainly means that racial minorities will not have the power to consistently elect candidates of choice as required under the Voting Rights Act. Competitive districts also pave the way for wild shifts in party balance despite only small statewide shifts in the vote balance. And given that most areas have natural partisan leanings, drawing competitive districts makes it difficult to follow traditional criteria like compactness and maintenance of local political lines.

In part due to these inherent conflicts, independent redistricting has had minimal impact on electoral competition and, at best, mixed impact on fair partisan, racial and gender representation. Arizona and Iowa are often highlighted by redistricting reformers for having adopted independent redistricting for congressional and state legislative elections, but neither state has particularly competitive elections nor the increased accountability and fairer representation sought by most reformers. In Arizona, for example, 15 of 16 U.S. House races were won by landslide margins of more than 20% in the first two elections since independent redistricting in 2001, and no incumbent has come close to losing. None of its 30 state senate seats were competitive in 2004; indeed almost half were not even contested.

Even though Iowa is almost uniquely balanced in its partisan division across much of the state, all of its U.S. House incumbents in 2004 were re-elected, with an average margin of victory of 18%. Iowa's incumbency rate in fact has been more than 97% since the adoption of independent redistricting. In addition, no woman has been elected to Congress in either Iowa or Arizona since adoption of independent redistricting, and women candidates have fared less well in state elections held after each round of independent redistricting in those states. Arizona Latinos sued their state plan, which has been in continuous litigation since 2002. The reality is that voter choice and fair representation are mutually exclusive in a single-member district, even with independent redistricting. The partisan imbalance within different areas of most states makes it impossible to draw districts that are both reasonably shaped and at the same time competitive.

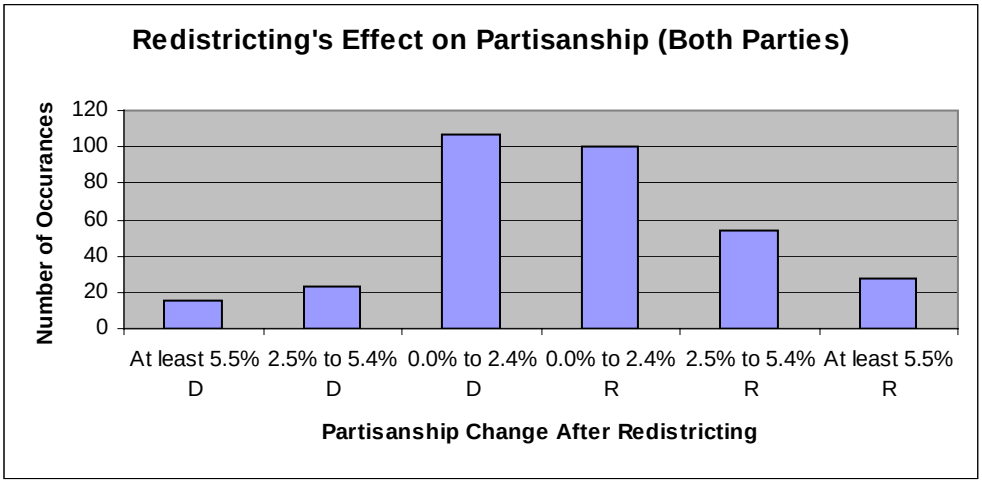
The root cause: A combination of incumbency, winner-take-all elections and hardening partisanship

As we look at how strikingly non-competitive House elections have become, we must confront the fact that by far the most important factor is that the U.S. House is elected in winner-take-all, single-member districts. Winner-take-all elections held with plurality voting rules tend to limit general elections to candidates from two parties. Given that the great majority of geographically-defined areas in the nation show clear preference for one party over the other, most incumbents have virtually a free ride because their party is preferred in their district. Even in those relatively few districts that are more balanced between backers of the major parties, incumbents can use a variety of advantages that come with their office – such as being quick to respond to constituents' non-partisan needs, sending out regular free mail to district voters, raising large sums of money – to make their defeat nearly impossible without exposure of personal corruption or a major national partisan shift.

Recent years have exaggerated the problem of lack of competition for several reasons: (1) incumbents and parties are more sophisticated about what incumbent officeholders should do in serving their district to shield themselves from competition; (2) new computerized methods of redistricting, combined with the need to draw new districts every ten years and the lack of nonpartisan standards governing the process, increasing the number districts with a

partisan tilt; (3) those partisan tilts are more decisive than ever because the national parties have become quite distinct in most voters' minds, leading to less ticket-splitting.

The end result is that most voters don't have a choice between two candidates, let alone three – so much for a healthy two-party system, where issues ignored by one major party can be meaningfully addressed by the other one. If voters would like to hear about the policy ideas of independent and third party candidates, they' are even more shut out. Yes, voter turnout is down over recent decades, but we believe it is time to stop blaming the victims of the American electoral system – the voters – and start addressing the root causes of alienation and lack of representation: our winner-take-all electoral system, buttressed by incumbent privileges and, yes, campaign cash and partisan redistricting run amok.



Reform Lessons from Partisan Voting Patterns in U.S. House Races, 1972-2002

If one studies the shifting district partisanship in congressional districts over recent decades, two trends stand out:

- Republican presidential candidates consistently run ahead of their national average in a large majority of districts (that measure is the consistent one we use to determine whether a district has a Republican bias or Democratic national bias.)

- Democratic Party dominance of districts with a Democratic bias has been relatively consistent over time – and the total number of such seats in fact has increased. Republican growth in House seats has come heavily in seats with a Republican bias.

We believe these facts support our contention that much of the behavior of legislators in Congress and the greater entrenchment of more incumbents are founded on the parties becoming more distinct and on voters voting more on national perceptions of the parties.

Because most congressional district-sized geographic areas have clear partisan tilts, then most congressional districts are going to be non-competitive no matter how the district lines are drawn. Redistricting reform certainly could make an incremental improvement in competitive choice, but potentially at a cost to representation of racial minorities. In contrast, by adopting a version of the Illinois model for electing its state house of representatives used from 1870 to 1980 (a non-winner-take-all system in three-seat legislative districts), nearly every three-seat constituency would have two-party representation as well as competition within parties in the general election. Representatives would cover the left, center and right of the spectrum in greater balance than now. Racial minorities would have opportunities to elect seats in more areas of the nation, and women would be more likely to run and win. Instructively, in 2001, a bipartisan panel in Illinois led by former Congressman Abner Mikva and former Illinois Governor Jim Edgar recommended restoring the Illinois model in order to achieve better elections and governance.

District Partisanship by Congressional District, 1972 to 2002

Prez Year	Median District	Seats with D Bias	Seats with R Bias
1972	54% - R	150 (20R, 130D - in 1974)	285 (124R, 161D – in 1974)
1988	52% - R	181	254
1992	52% - R	181	254
1996	51% - R	197	238
2000	51% - R	207	228
2002	51.5% - R	197 (29R, 168D)	238 (201R, 37D)

Note: Partisanship of districts is determined by the relative performance of major party presidential candidates in a district as compared to their national average. The median district refers to the partisan tilt of the 217th district in order of partisanship. The number of seats in parentheses in 1972 and 2002 refers to the number held by Republicans and Democrats in that category.

The GOP Turnout Machine Myth

If it Wasn't Real in 2004, Why Would it Be Now?

A consistent theme highlighted by pundits during the 2006 election season has been the Republican Party's alleged advantage in get-out-the-vote operations. A perception reinforced by Republicans' electoral successes in 2002 and 2004, this alleged advantage fails to hold up to scrutiny of the basis for that recent success. Republicans in fact did *relatively* poorly in the most hotly contested states in the 2004 presidential elections and did very poorly against Democratic congressional incumbents that year, only defeating one U.S. Senator and one U.S. House Member outside of those running in re-gerrymandered seats in Texas. What drove Republicans' electoral success in 2004 was not a "72-Voter Project," "micro-targeting" or an advantage in volunteers focused on get-out-the-vote; rather, they had an edge in basic voter preference. If it had been left solely to which party mobilized more new voters, the Democrats almost certainly would have won the presidency and done better in congressional elections.

Consider the 2004 presidential race. Nationally, George Bush increased his share of the two-party vote from 49.7% in 2000 to 51.2% in 2004, going from a 500,000 vote deficit to 3.5 million vote lead. But this national increase was not due to campaigning in most states. Senior consultant Matthew Dowd said in August 2004 that the Bush campaign had not polled a single person living outside of 17 potential battlegrounds since the campaign got underway in 2002, while during the final five weeks of the campaign, more money was spent by the major party campaigns on advertising in Florida than the combined totals for 45 states and the District of Columbia.

Both parties were most focused on the 13 states that were closest in their two-party partisanship – the ones they knew would tip a 50-50 election. In these battlegrounds, Democrats improved their 2000 performance by a per-state average of 1.33% percent, making gains in 11 of 13 states. While George Bush would have won 10 of these 13 hotly contested states in 2000 had the election been tied in the national popular vote, in 2004 he would have won only five of these states if the election had been even nationally. The fact that Democrats did *relatively* better in battlegrounds than in the rest of the country suggests that the Democrats' campaign efforts centered on swing states were in fact more effective than those of the Republicans. It was George Bush's national advantage in voter preference that carried him to victory, a fact that is underscored by exit polls suggesting that his key win in Ohio was far more based on converting voters who had supported Al Gore in 2000 than winning new voters.

John Kerry's campaign's relative success in battlegrounds thus helps explain why there were so few shifts in the Electoral College map despite Bush going from losing by a half million votes nationally to winning the national vote by three and a half million votes. Indeed 47 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia awarded their electoral votes to parties exactly as they had done in 2000. The three states that shifted – New Hampshire (to Democrat), Iowa and New Mexico (to Republican) – were among the five most closely contested elections in 2000. A shift of just 18,774 votes in those states would have meant an exact repeat of the 2000 state-by-state election results.

Shifts in Republican Partisanship in 2004 Election's 13 Closest States (within 47%- 53%)

State	2000	2004	Change	Dem. Gains	Rep. Gains
Colorado	54.44%	51.11%	-3.33%	3.33%	
Florida	50.26%	51.27%	1.01%		1.01%
Iowa	50.10%	49.10%	-1.00%	1.00%	
Michigan	47.69%	47.06%	-0.63%	0.63%	
Minnesota	49.06%	47.03%	-2.03%	2.03%	
Missouri	51.93%	52.37%	0.44%		0.44%
Nevada	52.03%	50.07%	-1.97%	1.97%	
New Hampshire	50.89%	48.09%	-2.81%	2.81%	
New Mexico	50.23%	49.17%	-1.06%	1.06%	
Ohio	52.01%	49.82%	-2.19%	2.19%	
Pennsylvania	48.18%	47.52%	-0.66%	0.66%	
Virginia	54.28%	52.87%	-1.41%	1.41%	
Wisconsin	50.15%	48.58%	-1.57%	1.57%	
Average	**50.87%**	**49.54%**	**-1.33%**		

Howard Dean's 50-State Strategy

Measuring Dean's Gamble in 2006 -- and in 2016

When former Vermont governor Howard Dean took the helm of the Democratic National Committee, he made a strategic decision to pump resources into all 50 states, in an attempt to build the Democratic Party in places where it hasn't been competitive in presidential races and most federal races for years. His so-called "50-state strategy" has been the source of much controversy, leading to Dean's public battles with Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chair Rahm Emanuel, who favors focused spending on targeted races.

Who is right? There are two ways to try to measure the answer: what happens in 2006 and what happens in 2016. The true measurement of Dean's decision will not be measurable for at least a decade, and that only if the Democrats continue to invest in his strategy for several election cycles. The Democratic Party's electoral problems in congressional races in recent years are grounded in a political geography that they must transform if they are to ever have a relatively secure majority. In today's electoral politics, when the national partisan division is evenly divided, Republicans win more than 50% support in 30 out of 50 states, which translates into Republicans winning 60 of 100 U.S. Senate seats if every voter voted for the same party in races for president and Senate. Republicans also would win a majority of the vote in 41 more of today's House seats than Democrats in such an election. If Democrats cannot either break out of a 50-50 political reality or reshape where they win support, their majorities will always be dependent on their candidates winning in Republican-leaning areas.

Looking to immediate results in 2006, some charge that given Democrats' finite resources and once-in-a-generation chance to make gains this year, Dean has been unwise to spend money in solidly Republican areas in states like Nebraska, Indiana and Texas. Looking through the lens of short-term results, a potential tidal wave in Democratic votes this year may lead to Dean being termed either a genius or a fool: he will be a genius if Democrats win House seats that would seemingly have been impossible to win a year ago, but he will be dismissed as a fool if they miss out with a series of tantalizingly narrow defeats.

"Dean is a Fool": The way you build long-term is to succeed short-term

- **Lessons from a shrinking number of competitive states in presidential races**: In 1976, 24 states were presidential battlegrounds, representing 345 electoral votes and most of the nation. By 2004, that number had more than half, to a mere 13 states representing 159 electoral votes. What's more, in 2004, 48 of 51 presidential contests went to the same party as in 2000 – underscoring how difficult it is to overcome rigid state partisanship in presidential elections even when your side has more than half a billion dollars to spend. So why sink resources in 50 states, rather than just 13?

- **With U.S. House districts tilted against Democrats, you must win when you can and hold on**: The rigid partisanship of states in presidential races is mirrored almost across the board in U.S. House races, and Republicans currently have an advantage of 41 more seats in an evenly divided year – with the median district being one that a Republican in an open seat would be favored to win by 4.5%. On top of that structural barrier, Republicans start off with the advantage of incumbency, which gives incumbents on average a likely boost of between 6% and 9%. In each of the four national elections since 1996, more than 98% of incumbents have won, and more than 90% of all races were won in comfortable wins of more than 10%. Of the 23 seats that were won by 10% or less, they are concentrated in 17 states. Of those 17 states, only 10 represent pick-up opportunities for the Democrats (CO, CT, IN, LA, MN, NC, NM, NY, PA, and WA). So why sink resources in 50 states, rather than the 10 where history indicates actual pick-up opportunities?

"Dean is a Genius": Lift the Party Up, State by State

- **It would take an unprecedented national shift for Democrats to win many House seats. Guess what? Its happening:** The tilted state partisanship of most of America's congressional districts means that no matter how you draw the lines, a majority of voters in each district will prefer one party to the other. In a nationally even year between the parties in congressional elections, therefore, Republicans typically will win an open seat race in a district that has a 55%-45% tilt with, surprise, 55% of the vote. And if the national climate shifts to a 54% year for the Democrats – the Republicans will still likely carry that district, albeit now by only 51% to 49%. Faced with the fact that most districts tilt toward Republicans and Republicans start out with more incumbents, Democrats need to do enormously well nationally to shift even just the 15 seats necessary to win a majority of the House. But this might just be the year that Democrats win the 57% or 58% of the national congressional vote that they need to take back the House with room to spare. The 50-state strategy was luckily timed to take advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity and create opportunities in races that few dreamed would be competitive this time last year – which is why Republicans are pouring out resources now to defend House districts in Republican strongholds like Kansas and Nebraska.

- **In elections witnessing unprecedented national shifts, parties pick up large numbers of seats down-ticket:** In a national tidal wave by one party in an election cycle, even though a marginal number of U.S. House seats might change hands, the dominant party can pick up an enormous amount of state legislative seats down-ticket. For example, the Republican wave in 1994 led to an increase of 514 more Republican state legislative seats. This year, there are 6,119 state legislative contests in 46 states and control of twenty state legislative chambers is decided by five or less seats. What indicates that Dean's 50-state strategy might be useful here is that of these ten potential chamber pick-ups, five of them are in states that Bush won in 2004: Alaska, Indiana, Kentucky, Montana, Nevada, and Tennessee. If these Democrats can stay in office, they can help shape these states' future political agendas and practical policy matters like redrawing district lines in the next scheduled redistricting in 2011.

- **Ticket-splitting means rock-solid presidential red-states don't equal rock-solid red-voting in all statewide races:** Just as in state legislative races, it seems likely that a Democratic tidal-wave would lift the chances of their candidates for governor and other statewide offices across the country. The Democrats are in range to pick-up eight Governors' mansions, and four of them are in states that Bush carried in 2004: Arkansas, Colorado, Ohio and Nevada. One by-product of winning high-profile states races is that it establishes these Democrats as candidates who later have a better chance of winning federal elections in Republican-leaning areas.

Conclusion

Initially, it seems that Howard Dean's 50-state strategy has been a wise gamble in this coming year of a Democratic tidal wave. But there's more to the story. Perhaps unexpectedly, Dean is meeting Rahm Emanuel's goal of building long-term success by building short-term successes – but the hidden truth is that if this year's partisan shift turns out to be a mere blip, rather than a realignment, the Democrats will need to turn to a 50-state strategy time and again to win elections consistently and to shake up its current dispersion of partisans to cover more areas within states.

This demand is due mainly in part to the natural geographic advantage Republicans currently hold in being the party that is more geographically dispersed across America. What this means is that barring an enduring national partisan shift toward Democrats, Democrats will almost never be secure in the red states and red districts where they see opportunities in this year. Assuming ongoing use of single-member district congressional elections (although that rule could be changed to multi-seat district system by congressional statute), Democrats face a clear challenge. Without cultivating a larger base and turnout operation over time in the 50 states and in rural and exurban areas where they now are in the minority, they will not be able to sustain the greater than 55%-45 edge they will need to secure lasting majorities in American congressional elections.

Downballot GOP Blues?

The Effect of a Democratic Tidal Wave on Control of State Legislatures

History shows Democrats are poised to make large state legislative gains. In a national tidal wave by one party, that party can pick up an enormous share of state legislative seats even if only a relatively marginal number of U.S. House seats change hands. This year, there are 6,119 state legislative contests in 46 states. 37% of these seats are uncontested by one of the major parties, making it seem like these are either missed opportunities for Democrats in a tidal-wave year, or the partisanship of these districts is so solid that the parties wisely avoided wasting resources in them.

In reality, the National Conference of State Legislatures indicates that Democratic candidates account for 64% of uncontested state house races and 56% of uncontested state senate races – similar to the congressional trend where Democrats are fielding candidates in 426 of 435 House races, while Republicans are only fielding candidates in 392 of 435 races, in sharp contrast to 2004 when Republicans ran seven more candidates than Democrats.

As an indication of what this advantage in candidacies could mean, the Republican national wave in 1994 led to an increase of 514 Republican state legislative seats. The vast disparity between uncontested Republican and Democratic legislative seats in a tidal-wave year creates more of an opportunity for surprising Democratic pick-ups.

More importantly, there are twenty state legislative chambers where the balance of power rests on five or fewer seats. Ten of these are Republican-controlled or tied legislatures, giving the Democrats the opportunity to win control of a majority of legislatures in the United States and to solidify control of the ten remaining chambers where they currently hold narrow majorities.

In the debate over the wisdom of Howard Dean's 50-state strategy, one measurement will be these ten potential chamber pick-ups: five of them are in states that George Bush won in 2004: Alaska, Indiana, Kentucky, Montana, Nevada, and Tennessee. If these Democratic state legislators can stay in office, they can help shape these states' future agendas and congressional district lines in 2011. They also create a farm team of potential candidates for higher office: Montana's Jon Tester, for example, was likely boosted in his current U.S. Senate race by publicity he received as president of the state senate.

State Chamber		Majority Party	Seat Margin
Alaska Senate		R	4 Seats
Colorado Senate		D	1 Seat
Colorado House		D	5 Seats
Delaware Senate		D	5 Seats
Indiana House		R	4 Seats
Iowa Senate		TIED	TIED
Iowa House		R	1 Seat
Kentucky Senate		R	5 Seats
Maine Senate		D	3 Seats
Maine House		D	1 Seat
Minnesota House		R	1 Seat
Mississippi Senate		D	4 Seats
Montana Senate		D	4 Seats
Montana House		TIED	TIED
Nevada Senate		R	3 Seats
New Jersey Senate		D	4 Seats
Oklahoma Senate		D	4 Seats
Tennessee Senate		R	2 Seats
Washington Senate		D	3 Seats
Wisconsin Senate		R	5 Seats

Of Spoilers and Minority Rule

Where split votes in general and primary election could swing seats

We all remember controversies surrounding whether the 1992 presidential candidacy of Ross Perot and the 2000 candidacy of Ralph Nader swung those elections. It is less well-known how frequently third parties and independents can change the results of general elections for major congressional and statewide offices – nor how fractured results in primaries with big candidate fields can affect representation and parties' general election odds. The 2006 mid-terms may remind us – and at the same time mark notable advances for instant runoff voting as a reform to ensure majority rule and accommodate increased voter choice. Below are profiles of how plurality voting rules are affecting elections in several states, a discussion of instant runoff voting ballot measures this year, and a listing of key races where winners may not win a majority in November.

Spotlighted November 7th Races

Texas Governor: Not Even Close to a Majority Winner?
The media bills this race as a wacky free-for-all battle to unseat incumbent Republican Rick Perry, who garnered just 38% in a recent poll. Democrat Chris Bell comes in at 22%, just ahead of independents Carole Keeton Strayhorn (a moderate Republican and mother of former White House spokesman Scott McClellan) at 21% and Kinky Friedman (an author seeking to capture Jesse Ventura's populist mantle) at 11%. It's highly unlikely we'll see a majority winner in a contest that is rhetorically a referendum on the incumbent, providing an example of how the opposing majority can fragment its own vote – and lose.

Montana Senate & Maryland Governor: Small Votes Can Have Enormous Consequences
Montana state senator Jon Tester (D) has maintained a small lead for weeks against Jack Abramoff-entangled incumbent Sen. Conrad Burns (R), but the latest state poll shows a dead heat after a cash infusion for Burns. Libertarian Stan Jones has polled as high as 3% - not threatening enough to win, but potentially enough to divide the Republican-leaning vote that otherwise might boost Burns. Similarly, Maryland incumbent governor Bob Ehrlich (R) has crept close to Baltimore mayor Martin O'Malley (D) in a race in which Green Party candidate Ed Boyd polls about 2%.

Idaho, Nebraska & Tennessee House Races: The Impact of Divided Votes in Primaries
Primary elections in the United States can produce nominees who do not represent the center of a party's supporters, let alone the overall electorate. First, the turnout tends to be far lower than general elections, with an all-time primary turnout low of 15% this year. Second, in most states the winner must have the most votes, not a majority. In lopsided districts for one party, that typically means a low-plurality primary winner after a number of candidates seek the nomination. Such was the case for Republicans in heavily Republican open seats this year in Idaho-1 and Nebraska-3, where their nominees won with less than 26% in the Idaho primary and less than 40% in the Nebraska primary. Seen as very conservative, they were pegged as extremists by Democratic challengers now given a chance of winning. Meanwhile, in Tennessee, the Democratic primary for the black-majority House district vacated by Harold Ford attracted several strong black candidates and one strong white candidate. The white candidate ultimately won with 29%, inspiring controversy and an independent bid by Ford's cousin Jake Ford – hardly the situation Ford wanted to see in his own backyard while working to win statewide in a majority-white state.

Louisiana and Texas House Races: Could House Control Hinge on December Runoffs?
It seems quite possible right now that Democratic incumbent Charlie Melancon in Louisiana and Republican incumbent Henry Bonilla in Texas won't get majority vote wins in their "Cajun Primary"-style elections. Because the Supreme Court required Bonilla's district to be redrawn after Texas' primary, it opened the field again to all challengers, with the top two facing off in December if no candidate has a majority – just as in Louisiana's congressional elections (although to be changed to a more traditional primary system in 2008). Majority voting avoids spoilers, but traditional runoffs mean turnout may drop sharply in December, and incredible resources could go to these likely highly competitive campaigns, particularly if they have a chance of deciding which party will control the House.

Pennsylvania Senate: Squashing Choice

Learning from the lesson of Ralph Nader and the 2000 presidential race, the Democratic Party successfully fought hard to keep the Green Party's nominee off the ballot in this year's U.S. Senate race between Democrat Bob Casey and Republican incumbent Rick Santorum. Earlier in the year, Kate Michelman, the former president of NARAL, considered an independent bid to present a third choice for those upset about both major party candidates taking pro-life positions. Her decision not to run almost certainly was influenced by her potential backers' fear of dividing the anti-Santorum vote. The end result may be a Casey win – but a lot of voters upset by their choices.

Instant Runoff Voting: A Solution Facing Key Tests on November 7

Momentum keeps growing for a means to correct the defects of our current plurality voting system's failure to accommodate voter choice. Instant runoff voting (IRV) is a ranked choice voting system that promotes majority winners. It is on the November 7th ballot in four U.S. cities averaging nearly half a million people.

Local advocates are cautiously optimistic about November ballot measure wins in Oakland and Davis in California, Pierce County (WA), and Minneapolis (MN) – in each jurisdiction the campaigns have won the support of the major daily newspaper, and in three cities the League of Women Voters has played a lead role in advancing reform. Following on the heels of an impressive win in the North Carolina state legislature and successful new IRV elections in Burlington (VT) and San Francisco (CA), momentum for this "win-win" solution to the spoiler problem could increase rapidly.

*Close Races and Potential Spoilers 2006: Key Examples**

State	Office	Close Contenders	Potential Spoilers ?
Alaska	Governor	Sarah Palin (R) vs. Tony Knowles (D) in open seat race to replace a Republican. Polls show Palin's margin over former governor has shrunk to 2%.	Billy Toien (Libertarian), Andrew Halcro (Independent)
Arkansas	Governor	Asa Hutchinson (R) vs. favored Mike Beebe (D) in open seat race to replace an R.	Jim Lendall (Green), Rod Bryan (Independent)
Colorado	Governor	Bob Beauprez (R) vs. favored Bill Ritter (D) in open seat race to replace a Republican.	Chuck Sylvester (Independent), Dawn Winkler-Kinateder (Libertarian)
Florida	Governor	Charlie Crist (R) vs. Jim Davis (D) in open seat race to replace a Republican.	Max Linn (Reform), several independents
Iowa	Governor	Chet Culver (D) vs. Jim Nussle (R) in a close open seat election to replace an R.	Wendy Barth (Green)
Maine	Governor	Gov. John Baldacci (D) vs. Chandler Woodcock (R). Baldacci leads narrowly.	Pat LaMarche (Green) and Barbara Merrill (Independent), both running with public financing.
Maryland	Senate	Ben Cardin (D) vs. Michael Steele (R) in an open seat race for a D seat	Kevin Zeese (Green, Libertarian and Populist Parties)
Maryland	Governor	Gov. Bob Ehrlich (R) vs. Martin O'Malley (D). O'Malley narrowly leads.	Ed Boyd (Green), Christopher Driscoll (Populist)
Massachusetts	Governor	Kerry Healey (R) vs. Deval Patrick (D) for the seat of retiring Gov. Mitt Romney (R)	Christy Mihos (Independent) NOTE This race is not considered close, but Mihos is expected to receive a significant vote.
Michigan	Senate	Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D) vs. Mike Bouchard (R)	Leonard Schwartz (Libertarian)
Michigan	Governor	Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) vs. Dick DeVos (R)	Douglas Campbell (Green)
Minnesota	Governor	Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R) vs. Mike Hatch (D) in a tight election	Ken Pentel (Green), Peter Hutchinson (Independence), Leslie Davis (American)
Minnesota	House	Keith Ellison (D) vs. Alan Fine (R) in an open seat race for a heavily D seat where third party candidate Lee seeks upset	Tammy Lee (Independence), Jay Pond (Green)
Missouri	Senate	Sen. Jim Talent (R) vs. Claire McCaskill (D)	Lydia Lewis (Green), Frank Gilmour (Libertarian)
Montana	Senate	Sen. Conrad Burns (R) vs. Jon Tester (D)	Stan Jones (Libertarian)
Nevada	Governor	Jim Gibbons (R) vs. Dina Titus (D) in an open seat race for governor.	Craig Bergland (Green), Christopher Hansen (American Independent)
New Jersey	Senate	Sen. Bob Menendez (D) vs. Thomas Kean Jr. (R)	Len Flynn (Libertarian), Greg Pason (Socialist)
Oregon	Governor	Gov. Ted Kulongoski (D) vs. Ron Saxton (R)	Joe Keating (Green), Richard Morley (Libertarian), Mary Starrett (Constitution)
Texas	House	In the open seat race for Tom Delay's seat, Republicans only have a write-in candidate against Democrat Nick Lampson	Bob Smither (Libertarian)
Tennessee	Senate	Bob Corker (R) vs. Harold Ford Jr. (D) in open seat race held by Republicans.	Chris Lugo (Green)
Wisconsin	Governor	Gov. Jim Doyle (D) vs. Mark Green (R)	Nelson Eisman (Green)

* There are several additional U.S. House races that easily could be won with less than 50% of the vote.

The Democrats' Paradox

Why a Win Could Shake Up House Leaders & The 2008 Presidential Race

Political odds-makers almost universally project a Democratic takeover of the U.S. House this election cycle. Yet few pundits are ruminating over what this might mean for governance, the future of Democratic caucus politics and the 2008 presidential contest. The nature of the districts where Democrats are likely to make gains, as well as the current composition of their caucus, indicate that the party may have to walk a tightrope in both governance style and presidential candidate selection in order to preserve its majority.

Democrats in Enemy Territory. Heading into the November 7 elections, the Democrats hold 18 seats in districts that have a Republican partisanship of at least 55% - that is, districts George W. Bush won by more than 5% above his national average in 2004. As a point of contrast, Republicans only hold three seats in districts that have a Democratic partisanship of at least 55% (ones John Kerry carried by more than 5% points above his national average). It is for precisely this reason that Republicans may have felt emboldened to pursue a relatively ideological agenda without fear of putting many of their members at risk. Thanks to the geographic dispersion of Republicans across congressional districts, Republicans of the conservative stripe are more numerous and safe than moderates of the Chris Shays variety. Indeed, moderate Republicans are generally the most vulnerable this cycle, but their small number has allowed the party to speak to its base without much fear of Democratic reactions (see table below). A Democratic majority will not have the same luxury.

Incumbents' Party	9%+ GOP	8 to 5% GOP	4 to 0% GOP	0 to 4% Dem	5 to 8% Dem	9%+ Dem	Totals
Republican	103	47	41	17	3	0	211
Democrat	9	9	12	18	29	111	188
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Totals	112	56	53	35	32	112	400

Potential Democratic Gains in Republican Districts. Meanwhile, Democrats need 15 additional seats to capture a majority. Pundits see roughly 37 seats in play as potential pick-ups – but only 11 of these seats are in districts with Democratic partisanships of 50% or greater. Yet fully 14 of the 37 potential pick-ups are in districts with Republican partisanships of 55% or greater. Even if the Democrats sweep all 11 Republicans out of office in the Democratic districts, they will still need to pick up four more seats in Republican territory in this best-case scenario. Realistically, a new Democratic majority will be composed of more than just 4 pick-ups in Republican-leaning districts. So, combining the 18 Democratic incumbents currently representing strongly Republican districts with at least four pick-ups in such districts, the new majority will rest on more than 20 incumbents in hostile territory, unlike the current Republican majority.

See this chart listing where Democrats may win seats in 2006 and the district partisanship.

State	District	Dem. District Partisanship (%)	Incumbent
CT	2	56	Simmons
CT	4	55	Shays
IA	1	54	*Open* - Nussle
FL	22	54	Shaw
CT	5	54	Johnson
PA	8	53	Fitzpatrick
PA	7	52	Weldon
CO	7	51	*Open* - Beauprez
PA	6	51	Gerlach

State	District	Dem. District Partisanship (%)	Incumbent
NH	2	50	Bass
NM	1	50	Wilson
NY	24	49	*Open* - Boehlert
FL	16	49	*Open* - Foley
GA	3	49	Lynn Westmoreland - R (Inc.)
AZ	8	48	*Open* - Kolbe
PA	4	48	Hart
OH	1	47	Chabot
FL	13	47	*Open* - Harris
MN	1	46	Gutknecht
CA	11	46	Pombo
NY	20	46	Sweeney
NY	26	46	Reynolds
IN	2	46	Chocola
OH	15	45	Pryce
IL	6	45	*Open* - Hyde
AZ	5	45	Hayworth
WI	8	45	*Open* - Green
MN	6	44	*Open* - Kennedy
VA	2	44	Drake
IN	9	44	Sodrel
IN	8	43	Hostettler
OH	18	42	*Open* - Ney
KS	2	42	Ryun
PA	10	42	Sherwood
NC	11	41	Taylor
OH	2	36	Schmidt
TX	22	33	*Open* - DeLay

Future U.S. Senate Control in Limbo. By most measures, should Democrats win control of the U.S. Senate this November, their majority will consist of a mere 51 seats. Notably, there are 33 Senate seats up in 2008, including six Democratic seats in states that Bush carried in 2004: Mark Pryor (AR), Tom Harkin (IA), Mary Landrieu (LA), Max Baucus (MT), Tim Johnson (SD), and Jay Rockefeller (WV). Of these six seats, four were won by 54% or less in 2002, and Rockefeller is rumored to be considering retirement, which would create an open seat in newly Republican territory. Meanwhile, Republicans will field only four incumbents in states that Kerry won in 2004, and only two of those seats were won with less than 54% of the vote: John Sununu (NH) and Norm Coleman (MN).

Analysis. Post-November 7th the Democratic Party may have to walk a tightrope in order to hold a majority in either chamber of Congress, given that the national political geography provides the Republicans a built-in advantage. The Democratic base will be anxious for rolling back the Republican agenda and aggressively attacking the Bush administration, but Democrats in Republican-leaning districts may be rightly wary of aggressively pursuing those strategies. As a result, leadership elections and caucus politics will be a challenge for the new Democratic leadership, and party elders may seek to provide momentum to a 2008 nominee who will not create perceived down-ticket problems for the potential Democratic majority (as occurred in the 2004 Democratic primary when party leaders were accused of trying to sabotage Howard Dean's bid in favor of John Kerry). It is yet unclear who will benefit from such a sentiment, but John Kerry notably did not contribute to the down-ticket loss of hardly any congressional Democrats in 2004, including those running in largely Republican districts.

Slouching Toward Diversity

2006 a Year of Small But Noticeable Gains for Women and Communities of Color

John Adams once wrote this about Congress: "This representative assembly should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large." His view of "mirror representation" remained pervasive among Members of Congress in the 19th-century as well. During the 1842 debates over whether Congress should mandate single-seat districts over winner-take-all, at-large elections, for example, several Congressmen borrowed Adams' portrait analogy to support their theories of what Congress should look like. Sen. Jacob Miller from New Jersey argued that the House should be "what the Framers of the Constitution intended it should be, a bright and honest mirror, reflecting all the lights and shades of the multifarious interests of this mighty people, as they lie spread out over this broad land."

Holding up the mirror now to our Congress, what do we see? While the U.S. population is over 50 percent female, the U.S. House and Senate are 85% male. The U.S. population is approximately 71 percent white and 29 percent from a community of color, but the U.S. House is only 16 percent from communities of color. As recently as 2004 the U.S. Senate did not have a single African American or Latino, and still remains 94% white. Only one African American (Douglas Wilder in Virginia in 1989) has been elected governor since Reconstruction.

While focusing on this descriptive representation is not very popular in many circles today, many yet argue that our "representative government" at least should come closer to mirroring our population by race, age, income bracket, and occupation. On that measure, 2006 appears to a year of small but noticeable gains for women and communities of color. Women are poised to gain between eight and 15 seats this cycle, along with potential small gains in Senate and Governors races, while candidates of color look poised to make small but potentially significant gains in races across the country.

2nd African American governor since reconstruction favored to be elected. Massachusetts Democrat Deval Patrick is poised to be first African American governor elected anywhere in the nation since 1989, when Doug Wilder won the Virginia governor's mansion. The remaining African American gubernatorial candidates, however, seem headed for defeat: Kenneth Blackwell (OH-R) and Lynn Swann (PA-R).

In the U.S. House, gains for communities of color look meager. Almost all members of the black and Hispanic caucuses look headed for re-election, with a few notable exceptions. Democrat Major Owens retired in NY-11, but is certain to be replaced by African American, Yvette Clark. Additionally, Cynthia McKinney was defeated in the Democratic primary for GA-4, but her certain replacement, Henry Johnson Jr. is also African American. William Jefferson (D) may run into troubles after high-profile scandals, but his serious "Cajun primary" competitors in LA-2 are also African American. Meanwhile, two Latino candidates, Henry Bonilla (R) and Ciro Rodriguez (D), are dueling in TX-23, but the district will continue to be represented by a Latino. The only likely seat loss for racial minorities, then, is TN-9, where Harold Ford (D) has vacated his seat to run for the U.S. Senate and white candidate Steve Cohen is the heir apparent after a 29% primary win in a fractured field with several African American candidates. Nevertheless, this decline will be likely offset by the likely victory of Democrats Keith Ellison (African American and Muslim) in MN-5 and the potential victory of Tammy Duckworth (Asian American) in IL-6.

The U.S. Senate looks unlikely to experience gains for communities of color: There are only three high-profile African American major party candidates for U.S. Senate this cycle, and all three look headed toward defeat. Erik Fleming (MS-D), Harold Ford, Jr. (TN-D), and Michael Steele (MD-R). Both Ford and Steele can take credit for making their races extremely competitive in states where their party was not favored to win. In other key elections, Sen. Daniel Akaka survived a tough primary challenge from a white U.S. House Member Ed Case in Hawaii, while Sen. Robert Menendez – appointed to fill Jon Corzine's vacancy earlier this year – is narrowly favored to hold his seat against a white challenger in New Jersey.

2006: Potentially the Best Year for Women Since 1992? *The Washington Post* recently called 2006 "a gender insurgency in politics." Although unlikely, women could pick up 21 seats in the House of Representatives on November 7, and two in the Senate, which would make for the biggest gains since

1992's "Year of the Woman," when women won 19 House seats, and three Senate seats. The 136 women nominated by their parties to seek House seats this year is only one less than the record set in 2004.

These gains would bring women's representation from 65 seats up to a potential record 86 seats in the U.S. House, where there is also tremendous symbolism in Rep. Nancy Pelosi potentially becoming the first woman to rise to the position of Speaker. The 21 potential pick-ups include 15 seats in what are widely seen as the 61 most competitive House races, as well as one competitive open seats between two women and five uncompetitive open seats where women candidates are heavily favored. Obviously, not all of the women in competitive races will win, and eight women incumbents' seats are in danger this fall, including: PA-4 Hart (R), VA-2 Drake (R), KY-3 Northup (R), CT-5 Johnson (R), FL-13 Harris (R), IL-8 Bean (D), NY-19 Kelly (R), and WY-1 Cubin (R). Realistically, this means that women are likely to pick up between 8 and 15 seats this cycle – still a significant gain, bringing them up to 17% or 18% of the House, although still fall short of full gender equality in the U.S. House and short of many modern democracies. Although many women Members are Republican, it is quite possible that all gains this year will be among Democrats except for Mary Fallin, who is favored to win in Oklahoma.

Possible Women Gains in Competitive Seats in the US House

AZ-8	Gabby Giffords (D) vs. Randy Graf (R) for an open seat.
VT-1	Martha Rainville (R) vs. Peter Welch (D) for an open seat
OH-18	Joy Padgett (R) vs. Zack Space (D) for an open seat
NJ-7	Linda Stender (D) challenging Rep. Mike Ferguson (R)
KS-2	Nancy Boyda (D) challenging Jim Ryun (R)
CT-4	Dianne Farrell (D) challenging Christopher Shays (R)
IL-6	Tammy Duckworth (D) vs. Peter Roskam (R) for open seat
MN-6	Michele Bachmann (R) vs. Patty Wetterling (D) for open seat
PA-6	Lois Murphy (D) challenging Jim Gerlach (R)
NY-20	Kirsten Gillibrand (D challenging John Sweeney (R)
TX-22	Shelley Sekula-Gibbs (R) launching a write-in against Nick Lampson (D)
NV-2	Jill Derby (D) vs. Dean Heller (R) for open seat
CA-50	Francine Busby (D) challenging Brian Bilbray (R)
AZ-1	Ellen Simon (D) challenging Rick Renzi (R)
NV-3	Tessa Hafen (D) challenging Rep. Jon Porter (R)
WA-8	Darcy Burner (D) challenging Rep. Dave Reichert (R).

Five Open Seats That are Sure Wins for Women House Candidates

District	Previously Held By	Woman Pickup	Party
FL-11	Jim Davis	Kathy Castor	D
HI-2	Ed Case	Mazie Hirono	D
NY-11	Major Owens	Yvette Clark	D
OH-13	Sherrod Brown	Betty Sutton	D
OK-05	Ernest Istook	Mary Fallin	R

Women Poised to Gain 1 or 2 Seats in the Senate and Perhaps in Governor's Mansions

Ten women have won the Republican or Democratic nod for governor this year, including five incumbents, all of whom look headed for re-election: Jennifer Granholm (D-MI), Linda Lingle (R-HI), Janet Napolitano (D-AZ), Jodi Rell (R-CT), and Kathleen Sebelius (D-KS). Women are running for three open gubernatorial seats, with Sarah Palin (R) favored in Alaska and Dina Titus (D-NV) closing the gap in Nevada. In the U.S. Senate, there are currently 14 women serving. This year six of them are up for re-election, and all six seem headed to victory. If women gain two seats, it would move to 16% - leaving the House 84% male, but still with eight times more women than serving in 1992.

Race	Candidate	Likely Outcome
Re-Election	Maria Cantwell (D-WA)	**Win**
	Hillary Clinton (D-NY)	**Win**
	Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)	**Win**
	Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX)	**Win**
	Olympia Snowe (R-ME)	**Win**
	Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)	**Win**
Challenging an Incumbent	Jean Hay Bright (D-ME)	Loss
	Katherine Harris (R-FL)	Loss
	Claire McCaskill (D-MO)	**Toss-up**
	Barbara Ann Radnofsky (D-TX)	Loss
	Cynthia Thielen (R-HI)	Loss
Open Seat	Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)	**Favored to win**

Incumbency Bumps

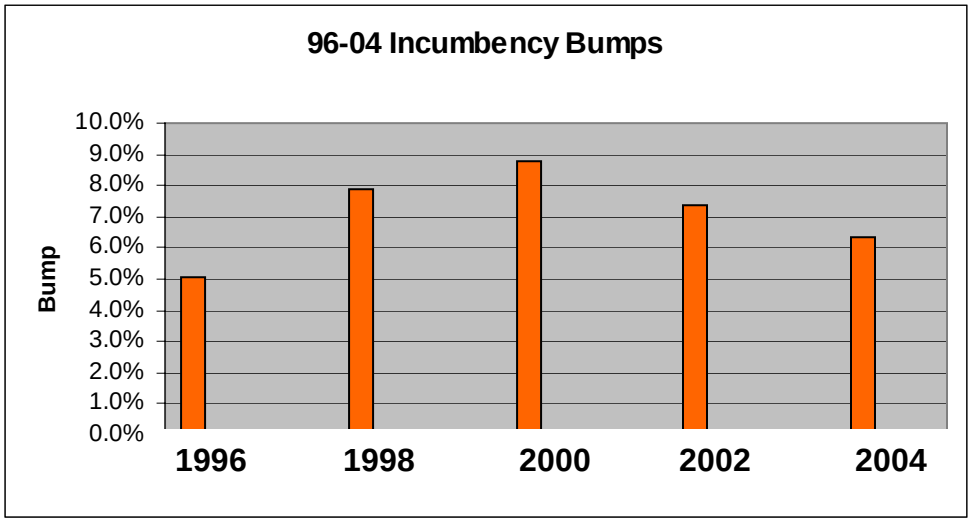
The Typical Incumbent Advantage, 1996-2004

Most incumbents not only represent districts leaning in their party's favor; their incumbency also tends to give them an advantage, based on a combination of name recognition from past campaigns, more campaign money, their ability to win support from constituents by helping them on non-ideological issues and regular franked mailings to their constituents about how well they are serving their district. Looking at elections from 1996 to 2004, FairVote found that incumbents on average won just over 7% above their projected partisanship, translating into a 14% average increase in their victory margin. The differences between the parties in certain election years suggest that those were ones years in which one party had a slight edge in the two-party national popular vote – with Democrats preferred in 1996 by about 1.5%, for example, and Republicans preferred in 2002 by about 3%.

Year/Margin	Candidate	Democrat	Republican	Ave/parties
1996	mean	5.6%	4.6%	5.1%
	median	6.0%	4.0%	
1998	mean	7.8%	8.0%	7.9%
	median	7.0%	7.5%	
2000	mean	8.2%	9.4%	8.8%
	median	7.0%	8.5%	
2002	mean	6.1%	8.7%	7.4%
	median	4.0%	8.0%	
2004	mean	6.9%	5.8%	6.3%
	median	6.6%	6.1%	

*Omits open seats and uncontested seats

Overall average for parties & years: 7.1%



Horserace Talk

Comparing the Democrats' 2006 Challenge to Republicans' 1994 Challenge

When evaluating Democrats' potential for seat gains, it is instructive to contrast the political landscape for Republicans in 1994 to the landscape for Democrats in 2006. Reflecting the general tilt in congressional district partisanship toward Republicans (a tilt that is primarily due to how concentrated each party's base of support is) and how many Democrats in 1994 were able to represent Republican-leaning districts, there are several stark differences. Even if Democrats in 2006 match the two-party vote totals of Republicans in 1994 (when the Republican advantage was about 54% to 46%), they have significantly fewer opportunities to translate that advantage into a comparable gain in seats. To experience anything comparable to the Republicans' electoral success in 1994, they almost certainly will need a two-party win more along the lines of 57% to 43%.

Consider the following analysis of open seats and vulnerable incumbents, in which the discussion assumes a 54%-46% Democratic year. Note that the parties are sometimes referred to "R" for Republican and "D" for Democrat.

Open seats

1994: 52 open seats

- Republicans leaving 21 seats and Democrats leaving 31 seats
- 37 seats in R-leaning districts (Republicans win 35, including 20 pick-ups from Democrats)
- 8 seats in districts with Democratic partisanship of 50% to 57% (Republicans win 4, including 2 pick-ups from Democrats
- 7 seats in districts with Democratic partisanship of at least 57% (Republicans win zero)

2006: 30 open seats

- R's leaving 19 seats, D's leaving 11 seats
- 11 seats in Democratic turf (Democrats already hold 9 of 11 of them)
- 11 in districts with Republican partisanships of 50% to 57% turf (R's hold 8 of the 11)
- 8 in districts with Republican partisanships of at least 57%+ (R's hold all 8)

Discussion:

- In 1994, Republicans picked up 20 open seats previously held by Democrats that were in Republican-leaning districts. But in 2006, Republicans only have to defend two open seats in a similar category - e.g., Democrats at most can only pick up 2 open seats in districts that are Democratic-leaning.

- In 1994, Republicans picked up 2 seats in districts that were less than 57% Democratic partisanship, held onto 2 open seats here and failed to win four. In 2006, Republicans have to defend 8 such seats. In a 54%-46% Democratic year, Democrats on average would win 5.

- In 1994, R's did not win any open seats in 57%-plus Democratic districts. Democrats have to take on 8 Republicans in such seats in 2006. Democrats on average would win 1 or 2 seats.

Bottom line:

The terrain for open seats was much more fertile for a 54%-46% partisan result helping Republicans in 1994 than Democrats in 2006. Based on the law of averages, Democrats would seem fortunate to gain 8 or 9 open seats in 2006, while in 1994, Republicans gained 22 open seats (and also lost 4 they had held).

Vulnerable incumbents

In 1994, Republicans defeated 34 Democratic incumbents. Of these incumbents, 27 were in districts that leaned Republican, including fully 11 representing districts that were at least 55% Republican.

In the current Congress, Republicans only have three incumbents who represent districts that FairVote measures as at least 55% Democratic (as opposed to 149 Democrats who represent these heavily Democratic districts). There are only 17 additional Republican incumbents who represent Democratic district in the 50%-54% range of Democratic partisanship. Even if the Democrats were able to take over all of these 20 districts – a highly unlikely result -- that would still be far short of the 27 defeated Democratic incumbents and 20 open seat gains in such districts in 1994. (Note that in addition, for Democrats to have a chance at long-term control of the House, one must hold onto your districts, not just win them once. Of the 7 Republican candidates who defeated Democratic incumbents in Democratic-leaning districts, four them lost in 1996. Of the 27 remaining Republicans' victorious challengers, only two were defeated that year.)

Bottom line:

Democratic challengers have to do far better in Republican-leaning districts in 2006 than Republican challengers needed to do in Democratic-leaning districts in 1994. The basic math of a significant Republican advantage in districts (after 2004, 238 districts were Republican leaning and only 197 Democratic-leaning) is a big boost for Republicans' ability to win elections and govern in a manner that pleases their base.

Competitiveness trends:

1992 (last pre-alignment election)

- 84 seats won by less than 10%
- 52 seats won by less than 5%
- 24 incumbents lost
- Average victory margin: 30.5%

2004 (with partisan alignment all the more solidified)

- 23 seats won by less than 10%
- 10 seats won by less than 5%
- 7 incumbents lost (only 3 not directly affected by Texas gerrymander in 2003)
- Average victory margin: 40.5%

Bottom line:

There is a much smaller universe of competitive seats, meaning more incumbents have greater cushions of support than incumbents did after the 1992 election. Note that this is much less due to gerrymandering than it is to hardening partisanship in the wake of the partisan realignment that accelerated after the Cold War, with Republicans solidifying congressional representation of much of the South, rural and exurban America. The biggest decreases in the competitiveness trends above in fact took place after the 1996 election, with a jump in the average victory margin in 1998 to 43% (from 30%) and a plunge in the number of close races from 80 won by less than 10% in 1996 to 43 in 1998. No more than six challengers have defeated incumbents in any House election since 1996, and more than 90% of races in each election have been won by at least 10%.

FairVote's Analysis of Open U.S. House Seats, November 2006											
State	2004 CD	2000 Winner	2002 Winner	2004 Winner	2002 Dist. P-ship	2004 District Pship	Projection 50D- 50R Year	Lowball Projection	Projection 54D- 46R Year	Lowball Projection	Partisan Impact, 54-46
Arizona	8	R	R	R	52.5% R	51.8% R	Toss-up	50%	Toss-up	50%	D lean - gain
California	22	R	R	R	65.0% R	67.3% R	Landslide R	62%	Likely R	57%	
Colorado	5	R	R	R	67.1% R	65.7% R	Landslide R	60%	Likely R	55%	
Colorado	7	New	R	R	51.4% D	53.1% D	Toss-up	50%	Likely D	52%	D gain
Florida	9	R	R	R	52.6% R	55.4% R	Leaning R	50%	Toss-up	50%	
Florida	11	D	D	D	62.6% D	59.7% D	Likely D	54%	Comfortable D	57%	
Florida	13	R	R	R	52.9% R	54.8% R	Leaning R	50%	Toss-up	50%	
Florida	16	R	R	R	51.5% R	52.7% R	Toss-up	50%	Toss-up	50%	D lean - gain
Georgia	4	D	D	D	70.9% D	73.9%	Landslide D	68%	Landslide D	71%	
Hawaii	2	D	D	D	57.8% D	57.4% D	Likely D	52%	Comfortable D	55%	
Idaho	1	R	R	R	70.6% R	68.0% R	Landslide R	63%	Comfortable R	57%	
Illinois	6	R	R	R	54.6% R	51.7% R	Toss-up	50%	Leaning D	50%	D lean - gain
Illinois	17	D	D	D	55.1% D	53.1% D	Toss-up	50%	Likely D	54%	
Iowa	1	R	R	R	53.8% D	54.5% D	Leaning D	50%	Likely D	54%	
Maryland	3	D	D	D	56.9% D	55.4% D	Leaning D	50%	Likely D	54%	
Michigan	7	R	R	R	52.2% R	53.4% R	Toss-up	50%	Toss-up	50%	
Minnesota	5	D	D	D	64.4% D	72.5% D	Landslide D	67%	Landslide D	69%	
Minnesota	6	R	R	R	56.2% R	56.1% R	Leaning R	51%	Toss-up	50%	
Nebraska	3	R	R	R	73.1% R	74.6% R	Landslide R	69%	Landslide R	63%	
Nevada	2	R	R	R	61.0% R	57.3% R	Likely R	52%	Leaning R	50%	
New Jersey	13	D	D	D	73.9% D	70.6% D	Landslide D	65%	Landslide D	67%	Uncontested
New York	11	D	D	D	84.2% D	87.8% D	Landslide D	81%	Landslide D	83%	
New York	24	R	R	R	51.3% R	51.7% R	Toss-up	50%	Leaning D	50%	D lean - gain
Ohio	4	R	R	R	63.7% R	63.9% R	Comfortable R	58%	Likely R	53%	
Ohio	6	D	D	D	51.5% R	50.7% D	Toss-up	50%	Likely D	54%	
Ohio	13	D	D	D	54.2% D	57.4% D	Likely D	52%	Landslide D	60%	
Ohio	18	R	R	R	57.6% R	55.8% R	Leaning R	50%	Toss-up	50%	
Oklahoma	5	R	R	R	60.8% R	62.4% R	Comfortable R	57%	Leaning R	52%	
Tennessee	1	R	R	R	60.9% R	66.9% R	Landslide R	61%	Comfortable R	56%	
Tennessee	9	D	D	D	64.8% D	71.3% D	Landslide D	66%	Landslide D	68%	
Texas	22	R	R	R	65.6% R	62.7% R	Comfortable R	57%	Comfortable R	57%	D Uncontested
Vermont	1	I	I	I	52.2% D	60.6% D	Likely D	55%	Comfortable D	58%	
Wisconsin	8	R	R	R	55.0% R	54.0% R	Leaning R	50%	Toss-up	50%	
Projection Based on P-Ship: Toss-up: 48-52%; Leaning: 48%, 56%; Likely: 45-47%, 53-55%; Comfortable: 40-45%, 55-60%; Landslide: 0-40%, 60-100%											