

Pollyprize panel report, 2006 US House of Representatives election forecasts

Klarner and Buchanan's report, "Predicting the 2006 Elections for the U.S. House of Representatives," with a point forecast of +22 seats for the Democrats, foresees the Democratic takeover of the House, and is quite close to their actual net seat gain (which today, November 21, with five seats still undecided, is 29, probably going to be the final tally). In addition to high accuracy, the model affords excellent lead time, releasing its forecast in April 2006, over six months before the election. Indeed, this shows a greater lead time than all other efforts reported in Polly's Archives. It is the unanimous choice of the panel as winner of the 2006 Pollyprize competition.

Besides these positive attributes, the model is methodologically innovative. Most empirically driven models use either districts or the nation itself as the unit of analysis. In contrast, this study uniquely combines the two levels, pooling district-level results over national elections across time. That's how it should be. House elections are not purely national contests but are largely decided by the strength of the district candidates, with national tides having some bearing on the outcome. In so doing, they achieve a very useful $N = 5899$. The model appears to include all the candidate variables identified in the literature. Perhaps some of them overlap, but the data sample is large enough to afford some redundancy. The authors provide a comprehensive listing and description of the variables making replication of results straightforward.

A nice feature is that the model covers both on-year and off-year elections. The change between the two is captured by the midterm penalty. Presidential coattails may have been clipped, but not eliminated. Also, while the model estimates the vote division for each of the House districts, the forecast is for the seat distribution.

Finally, the model is based on the strong theoretical notions that are behind the best of this forecasting literature. The explanatory variables in the model measure incumbency, candidate quality, economic growth, presidential popularity, and the district's voting history. These variables have statistically significant effects in the expected direction and, taken together, account for 86 percent of the variation in presidential party House Seat share, and produce a respectably low standard error of estimate, at just under 7 seats.

The authors also provide a probability distribution of prospective results, which indicated a nearly 95-percent chance that the Democrats would capture a majority.

The Pollyprize panelists

Michael Lewis-Beck
Helmut Norpoth
Lars-Erik Öller
Len Tashman
P. Geoffrey Allen, chair