## The War in Iraq and the 2006 U.S. Elections

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In November 2006, voters gave Democrats back control of the new Congress, with a 233-202 margin in the House of Representatives and a slim 51-49 edge in the Senate. While most people vote pocketbook issues, the traditional wisdom is that Democrats in 2006 toppled Republican majorities in the House and the Senate in large part because of voter discontent over the war in Iraq.

Casualty rates per 100,000 population were calculated for each state. (Members of the U.S. military who have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003 through November 6, 2006 — the day before election day — are from http://icasualties.org/oif/ByState.aspx. Population estimates by state in 2006 are from http://www.census.gov/popest/states/tables/NST-EST2006-01.xls .) A two-sample t-test was run on the difference between the average casualty rate in two groups of states: (i) nineteen blue states (that were won by John Kerry, the Democratic presidential candidate in November 2004) and thirty-one red states (that were won by President George W. Bush, the Republican incumbent); (ii) the six states where Democrats picked up a Senate seat in 2006 v. all other twenty-seven states with a Senate race; and (iii) the eighteen states where Democrats picked up one or more House seats in 2006 v. all other states. The first two comparisons revealed no discernible differences [blue states = 1.024, red states = 1.155, p = .322 and states in which Democrats picked up a Senate seat = 1.09, all other states with a Senate race = 1.065, p = .832]. In the third comparison, however, the average casualty rate in states where Democrats picked up House seats (0.919) was significantly *lower* than it was in all other states (1.180), p = .040.

When the state's unemployment rate in November 2006 was used in place of casualty rates, there were no differences between the two group averages for any of the three comparisons. For the third group comparison, the average unemployment rate in states where Democrats picked up one or more House seats was 4.38 percent v. 4.36 percent in all other states, p = .955.

The mistaken impression is that if voter discontent reflected casualty rates, then states with the *highest* casualty rates would have enabled Democrats to pick up House seats. The evidence presented here suggests that the power of incumbency in House races in those states trumped discontent over the war in Iraq.