

**CANDIDATE VALENCE AND IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING
IN THE 2006 HOUSE ELECTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

We test the relationship between the non-policy or valence qualities of candidates and the ideological positions they take in U.S. House elections. By employing both district informants and large constituent samples from the 2006 election, we contribute to the literature by 1) distinguishing between personal-quality and strategic dimensions of candidate valence; and 2) explicitly incorporate district preferences in the analysis by placing both candidates and districts on the same ideological scale. Consistent with the theoretical work of (Groseclose 2001), we find that incumbents with a personal-quality valence advantage place themselves closer to their district medians, while disadvantaged challengers take more extreme policy positions. We confirm these findings by analyzing vote share, which shows that disadvantaged challengers are reap electoral rewards for taking more extreme positions, although the primary effect is due to the strategic dimension of valence. Our findings suggest that the valence and policy components of representation are complimentary—that citizens do not face an inherent tradeoff between their policy interests and their interest in candidates of high personal quality of candidates.

Representation is a complex, multidimensional concept that characterizes a political fiduciary relationship between representative and constituency. Empirical studies have primarily focused on a policy-based conception of representation (Miller and Stokes; etc), which is probably consistent with the major focus of prominent theories of representation (Pitkin 1967).¹ Emphasis on a policy-centered concept of representation makes sense since governmental institutions exist to make public policy, and elected representatives are supposed to play a central role in policymaking in order to assure that government is responsive to the public. Within the large body of work on policy representation, a dominant strain traces its intellectual roots to the work of Anthony Downs (Downs 1957) and the convergence hypothesis. This hypothesis states that in a two-party (or two-candidate) competition, the candidates/parties converge on the position taken by the median voter in the electorate.

An emerging literature on representation addresses a second dimension, sometimes referred to as “valence” or non-policy factors (Stokes 1963). This literature explicitly recognizes the fiduciary relationship between representative and represented, but argues that qualities such as personal integrity and competence are valued by constituents because they cannot monitor every decision their representatives make (Bianco 1994). Identifying and rewarding the personal qualities that make for a trusting relationship may be an efficient way for voters to protect themselves against shirking, besides being qualities that they value in their representatives for their own sake (McCurley and Mondak 1995; Mondak 1995). In this context, “shirking” refers to the

¹ Eulau and Karpis (1978) argue for an explicitly multi-dimensional concept organized around four different types of responsiveness.

representative pursuing interests contrary to the preferences and interests of her constituency, usually manifested as “extremist” policy positions consistent with her personal views as opposed to adopting policy positions in line with the median voter in the constituency.

Employing data on the 2006 elections, we examine the empirical relationship between the valence and policy dimensions of representation in a simple Downsian framework. Although the literature takes up this question (Feld and Groffman 1991; Groseclose 2001; Burden 2004; Adams et al. 2005), significant theoretical ambiguities and inconsistent empirical results remain. The question is important because if a valence advantage by one candidate over the other creates the opportunity and incentive for the representative to shirk, these two components of representation work at cross purposes. On the other hand, if constituents’ interests in non-policy and policy concerns reinforce the quality of representation on both dimensions, there is cause for optimism about the electoral process. Unfortunately, however, two contradictory hypotheses receive empirical and/or theoretical support in the literature: (1) Candidates with a valence advantage are more likely to shirk; and (2) candidates with a valence advantage are more responsive to constituency interests. Our goal is to provide new evidence that clarifies the relationship between the two dimensions of representation.

THE CONVERGENCE HYPOTHESIS

The Downsian hypothesis that parties (and their candidates) in a two-party system converge on the preferences of the median voter offers a “good-news, bad-news” perspective on representation in two-party systems. The bad news is that if candidates

converge, voters have difficulty determining the differences between them on ideological/policy grounds, and may be forced to choose on the basis of non-policy grounds. Downs viewed this as a “rationality crisis” in such systems because rational behavior by parties to maximize their vote undermines rational voter behavior, forcing voters to consider factors not directly related to policy considerations such as party identification or the personal attributes of candidates.² The “good news,” however, is that when candidates converge on the median voter’s preferences they are committed to a policy course that meets an intuitive definition of a representative outcome. If candidates were to adopt positions distinctly to the left and right of center, they would make it easier for voters to understand the differences between them, but the winner would be committed to a course of action opposed by a substantial majority of the electorate (Page 1978). The irony, then, as many have pointed out, is that by following rational strategies in an ideological space, the two parties simultaneously would adopt optimal positions to best represent the collective ideological preferences of the electorate and remove ideology from most voters’ consideration as a determinant of their vote.

The problem with this view of how two-party competition works is that it does not seem to describe the actual state of affairs in American politics. The literature investigating the Downsian convergence hypothesis is extensive.³ Three general conclusions seem to be warranted: First, there is regular and substantial *divergence* between the two major parties in U.S. politics. The most extensive studies are of the Congress, where a large and apparently growing divide between the Democratic and

² As Downs put it (1957, 138): “if any party believes it can increase its chances of gaining office by discouraging voters from being rational, its own rational course is to do so.”

³ Recent reviews are provided in Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart (2001), Burden (2004) and Adams et al (2005).

Republican parties is evident. This partisan divide shows up in differences between the parties within Congress, comparing for example the roll-call voting behavior of Democratic and Republican representatives (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). It is also evident when we compare Democratic and Republican candidates (Ansolabehere et al. 2001; Burden 2004). Within the congressional context, there is little evidence that the two parties converge in the positions they take.

A second conclusion supported in this literature is that within the structure of partisan polarization, members of Congress differ in the positions they take in response to variations in district preferences (Erikson and Wright 2000). Thus, although the average Democrat in Congress is liberal, Democrats from relatively conservative districts are less liberal than those from liberal districts, and while Republicans are conservative, their degree of conservatism is also sensitive to the ideological coloration of their constituencies. This pattern of responsiveness to variation in district positions is usually described as distinctly secondary to the clear divisions between the two parties nationally (Ansolabehere et al., 2001), but it is apparent across a large number of studies employing different measures and methods.

The third generalization is that there also appears to be an electoral penalty associated with ideological extremism. There is perhaps somewhat less in the way of scholarly consensus supporting this conclusion than the first two (Bernstein, Gerald Wright et al. 1988), but on balance the result seems to hold up. In perhaps the most recent and comprehensive analysis of the question as it applies to the House of Representatives, Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan (2002) conclude that incumbents' vote share and their probability of reelection are reduced by voting with their party's extreme.

Thus, members of Congress appear to incur negative electoral sanctions if they vote in an ideologically extreme manner, a finding that does not necessarily confirm the convergence hypothesis, but that does suggest centrist policy behavior is more acceptable to the electorate than support for extreme policy positions.

VALENCE EFFECTS

In his seminal critique of the Downsian spatial framework for understanding party competition, Donald Stokes distinguished between “position-issues” and “valence-issues.” Position issues are “those that involve advocacy of government actions from a set of alternatives over which a distribution of voter preferences is defined.” (Stokes 1963, 373). These are the sorts of issues that form the liberal-conservative dimension along which voters, candidates, congressional districts, and members of Congress can be located. One district may be more liberal than another; one candidate may be extremely conservative while her opponent is moderately conservative, etc. The point is that actors may be thought of as arrayed along a dimension of more or less support for issue alternatives by the positions they take.

In contrast to position issues, Stokes defined valence issues as “those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate.” (Stokes 1963, 373) Stokes used corruption in government as an example – there is no variation in the positions voters or candidates take on the “issue” of corruption, since everyone is against it. However, political outcomes often turn on which party is associated with valued outcomes such as virtue in government, peace, and low unemployment. It is true that position issues relate to how best to achieve these

valued outcomes, but there is also no doubt that election outcomes are sometimes more dependent on which party is associated with such outcomes (or blamed for their opposites), than on which party is closer to the electorate on how best to achieve them.

While Stokes offered the concept of valence issues as a critique of the Downsian spatial model, scholars recently have explored how candidates' valence advantage might affect their ideological position relative to their constituency. One perspective on this question has been motivated by explanations of why the Downsian convergence hypothesis is incorrect. The general hypothesis in this literature is that a valence advantage permits the favored candidate (usually the incumbent) the freedom to be more extreme in her policy positions than would be possible in the absence of a valence advantage. Richard Fenno (1978) pointed out that House members who build strong personal reputations in their districts have more leeway to explain apparently wayward votes or to withstand constituency-based pressures when they vote out of line with district preferences. Barry Burden (2004, 213) is explicit in advancing the hypothesis that "the favored candidate ...[has] the luxury of remaining distant from the median voter," and that candidates who "are strong in other, non-policy ways have the freedom to maintain their relatively extreme positions." (Burden 2004, 220) Indeed, Burden found that incumbents in the 2000 election were more extreme than challengers, leading him to conclude "that in many districts the winning candidate is actually further from the center than the loser, but manages victory on the basis of non-ideological criteria that overwhelm the modest effects of ideological proximity." (Burden 2004, 221)

The claim that a valence advantage frees incumbents and candidates to adopt positions more in keeping with their own views (and therefore more extreme than their

constituents') has a certain intuitive appeal, but some theoretical work has suggested exactly the opposite conclusion (cf. Adams, Merrill and Groffman 2005; Feld and Groffman 1991; Groseclose 2001) In the Groseclose model, uncertainty about the distribution of constituency ideological preferences pushes the candidate with a valence advantage toward the center. By moving toward the center, the advantaged candidate minimizes the policy differentiation between himself and his opponent. In the absence of policy differentiation, voters are left to vote on valence alone, making the candidate who is superior on valence difficult or impossible to defeat (Berger et al. 2000); Feld and Grofman 1991). In this way, the advantaged candidate forces the opposition to adopt a more extreme position to differentiate himself on policy from the candidate with a valence advantage. Because there is uncertainty about the ideological position of the constituency median voter, there is a chance that by moving toward the extreme, the disadvantaged candidate may win on policy/ideological grounds. Consequently we should observe elections where advantaged candidates are relatively close to the district median and disadvantaged candidates are more distant from the district median.

ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF VALENCE AND IDEOLOGICAL PROXIMITY

Two questions are unresolved in the literature on valence and candidate position: (1) What is the meaning and appropriate measure of valence? And (2) moderation relative to what? Both have design and measurement implications that affect the consistency of empirical results and the inferences we draw from the literature.

Valence Reconsidered

Since Stokes' article was published, the term "valence" has frequently been used to refer to any non-policy based advantage a candidate or party might have. For example, Groseclose (2001, 862) equates a candidate's valence advantage to such factors as "incumbency, greater campaign funds, better name recognition, superior charisma, superior intelligence, and so on." Burden (2004) discusses "non-policy" advantages of candidates employing the office-holding standard (including incumbents as office holders) common in congressional election studies. Defining valence to include purely strategic factors such as name recognition and fundraising skills may be appropriate when the concern is with the strategic choices candidates make about where they locate themselves on the left-right scale, but if valence is part of our conception of representation, it should be limited to non-policy factors that voters explicitly value for their own sake. Thus, voters probably value intelligence and charisma in a candidate because these are qualities that have intrinsic value and may facilitate voters' trust of their representatives' ability to advocate constituency interests. In contrast, name recognition and campaign funds, while necessary to mounting a successful campaign, are not of intrinsic interest to voters.⁴ Therefore, we distinguish between non-policy attributes or qualities of candidates such as integrity, skill, and competence that are of intrinsic interest to voters and qualities that are primarily of strategic import.

⁴ Voters should care about strategic qualities such as name recognition and funding because they care about which candidates can get elected. Thus, they want candidates who are otherwise attractive to have high name recognition and ample funding, and they hope that candidates whom they oppose do not have these sorts of skills and resources. Our point, therefore, is not that voters do not or should not care about strategic resources, but only that they are not of the same intrinsic interest that policy agreement and qualities such as integrity and competence.

The distinction between valence advantages that rest on qualities and abilities of a candidate that are of intrinsic value to voters and those such as name recognition or funding that are primarily of strategic value is a difficult one to draw. Incumbency (or office-holding experience generally), for instance, might reflect the ability to raise money and high name recognition, or it might result from qualities and skills such as competence and integrity. Almost surely it reflects both. Ideally, then, we seek a design and measures that allow us to distinguish empirically the personal-quality side of valence from strategic skills and resources.

The difference between the strategic and personal-quality dimensions of valence raises questions about representation because of the potential relationship between valence and candidate positions, as described above. Assume that Groseclose is correct in asserting that a valence advantage pushes the advantaged candidate toward the district median and the disadvantaged candidate toward the extreme. If candidates with greater personal quality valence also are motivated to become more representative of the constituency's policy interests, the relationship between constituency and representative on both dimensions of representation is enhanced. If, in contrast, the valence advantage rests on purely strategic advantages, it may still strengthen policy representation, but voters might face a tradeoff between the personal qualities they value in their elected leaders and their policy interests. The ideal approach in studies of the effect of valence on policy representation, therefore, would be one that allows us to observe the effect of *both* the strategic and the personal-quality dimensions of valence on ideological proximity to the constituency.⁵

⁵ Because personal quality is valued for its own sake by voters and others in the district, it is likely to influence candidates' and potential candidates' ability to attract strategic resources. For example, a

Ideological Proximity or Extremism?

A second problem in the study of ideological positioning and valence in congressional elections is that the placements of House members, candidates, and districts are not in the same metric on the ideological scale. Ideological placements of incumbents and challengers, for instance, may be based on roll-call votes and/or questionnaire items (see Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2000; Burden 2004; Erikson and Wright 2000) while district ideological placement is typically based on the partisan division of the presidential vote in the district. While this may be a serviceable measure of districts' ideological proclivities, it does not establish the ideological position of the district, nor does it allow the analyst to compute proximity scores between House candidates and their districts. This, in turn, means that measures of "extremism" are not measured relative to the district, but are based on the position of the incumbent relative to other incumbents (e.g., Canes-Wrone 2002) or relative to the challenger (Burden 2004). The assumption of such studies is that "extreme" candidates relative to the comparisons made are also extreme relative to the district, but that assumption need not be correct. One candidate might be more conservative than another simply because he comes from a more conservative district. Without accounting for the position of the district, it is impossible to make substantive assessments of the extremity of candidates. Thus, the convergence hypothesis is best tested using proximity scores that place candidates and

competent candidate with high personal integrity should be more successful in raising money than a candidate of lower personal quality, other things being equal.

districts on the same ideological scale rather than computing extremism scores relative to actors other than the district (Achen 1978).⁶

THE 2006 ELECTION STUDY DESIGN AND MEASUREMENT

Our study is based on a random sample of 97 U.S. House districts combined with an over-sample of 54 districts that were either known to be open or judged by experts in the early summer of 2006 to be competitive.⁷ We report results from the random sample of districts unless otherwise indicated.

The constituent surveys are based on the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES).⁸ In addition to the 1000-respondent module that constituted the UC Davis component of the study, we draw upon items that were included in the core survey, numbering over 36,000 respondents nationwide. The large size of this sample affords us the opportunity to build district-based measures of constituency opinion based

⁶ A difficulty with employing measures of district and representative ideological position on different metrics (e.g., presidential vote share and roll call votes, respectively) is that at a descriptive level, one cannot determine whether representatives are systematically shifted to the right or left relative to the absolute preferences of their districts. Thus, in a regression equation, even if presidential vote share adequately controls for the relative liberalism of the district, it cannot control for the possibility that the most liberal representative is more conservative than the most liberal district. By the same logic, it employing variables on different metrics cannot allow us to entertain the possibility that the most liberal representative is much more liberal than the most liberal district, and that the most conservative representative is much more conservative than the most conservative district. This would amount to their being substantially greater difference between the parties in Congress than there is between districts represented by the two parties, a question of obvious importance to studies of party polarization in Congress.

⁷ The sources we consulted were *Congressional Quarterly*, *Cook Report*, *Sabato Crystal Ball*, and *National Journal*. If a district was rated as a “tossup” or “leaning competitive” by any of the sources, we included it in the competitive-district oversample. There was substantial overlap among the four sources, with correlations among them $> .70$.

⁸ The UC Davis module was conducted in collaboration with Bob Huckfeldt. For details on the CCES study, see <http://web.mit.edu/polisci/portl/cces/>. A second, telephone survey of registered voters was conducted in the same districts under the auspices of the Survey Research Center, Indiana University. This paper does not include data from the IU survey.

on unusually large district samples.⁹ The primary use of these data in this paper is to compute mean district opinion on the liberal-conservative scale.

In addition to the constituent surveys, we conducted a separate survey of district informants, who were 2004 Democratic and Republican national convention delegates or state legislators residing in the sample districts. Our assumption is that national convention delegates and state legislators are highly knowledgeable about their House district, the candidates running, and the campaigns they conducted. The district-informant survey was conducted by mail during the month of October, 2006, before the November election.¹⁰ We aggregate informant perceptions to the district level so that the unit of analysis throughout is the district and/or candidate. We have used district informants in prior House election studies to good effect (Stone and Maisel 2003; Stone, Maisel et al. 2004), but this is the first study designed to include constituent surveys in the same districts in which elite and activist informants were surveyed.

We do not undertake a full analysis of the validity and reliability of the informant-based measures in this paper. However, if our approach is sound, informant perceptions of districts' ideological positions and partisan makeup should correlate with the corresponding measures of district opinion generated from the Polimetrix survey. We asked informants to place the two parties' candidates in their district on the liberal-conservative scale, which should likewise relate to the DW-Nominate scores generated from incumbents' roll-call voting. The correlation between informants' perceptions of

⁹ The mean number of respondents per district in the sample districts is 85.8, with a standard deviation of 27.4. The smallest district N is 20; the largest is 151. The analysis is weighted to adjust for the size of the district samples.

¹⁰ We received responses from 940 delegates and state legislators for a response rate of 21%. The average number of informants per district was 6.2, with a standard deviation of 4.3. We received responses from at least one informant in 151 of 154 sample districts, with district N's ranging from 1 to 27.

their districts' party identification and aggregated constituent-based party identification; and between informants' perceptions of district liberalism and registered voters' self placement are .68 and .63 respectively. The correlation between the mean placement of incumbents on the left-right scale and the same incumbents' DW-Nominate scores is .92.¹¹

These results provide some reassurance that it is reasonable to proceed with the informant-based measures.¹² For purposes of testing the relationship between constituency and candidate ideology, we use the informant placements to locate both the incumbent and the challenger on the liberal-conservative scale and to compare their placements with that of the district. District placements are from the Polimetrix surveys. Because we have both the constituency and the candidates on the same scale, we can also compute proximity scores as the absolute difference between the incumbent or challenger placement and the district on the liberal-conservative dimension.¹³

Candidate Valence

We put batteries of questions to informants about candidates' strategic and personal quality, which give us a rich array of measures tapping these two dimensions of valence for both incumbents and challengers.¹⁴ All items are scored on seven-point

¹¹ When we break the data down by the party of the incumbent, the correlations are weaker, but by no means disappear. Among Democratic incumbents the correlation is .66; among Republicans it is .48.

¹² A more extensive analysis of an informant-based measure of incumbent prospects and incumbent vote share from the 1998 election may be found in Stone et al 2007.

¹³ The common-content liberal-conservative item is scored on a five-point scale, whereas the informant-based measures are scored on 7-point scales. We have rescaled the five-point version of the ideology question to match the 7-point format utilized in the informant survey.

¹⁴ Partisan bias is evident in individual informants' assessments of candidates, especially on the personal quality items. Because we have informants in both parties rating candidates in their own and the opposite party, we adjust all scores for this partisan bias before we aggregate informants' ratings to the district level (Stone and Maisel 2003).

scales ranging from “extremely weak” (-3) through “extremely strong” (+3). Table 1 demonstrates that incumbents had a substantial advantage over challengers on items designed to capture the strategic qualities, skills, and resources candidates need to mount a successful campaign. On every strategic item, challengers receive negative scores and incumbents are rated positively, with the largest differences evident in name recognition, fundraising, and the ability to attract attention. We have computed a strategic-quality index based on the mean of individual items, which reflects the substantial advantage incumbents enjoy on this dimension over their challengers.

(Table 1)

The personal quality items also reveal an incumbent advantage, although one not nearly as great as was true of the strategic items. On all of the individual items and on the personal quality index challengers received positive average ratings. Incumbents were also rated positively although they were not rated as highly on these items as they were on the strategic battery. We computed relative strategic and personal quality scores by subtracting the challenger’s score on each index from the incumbent’s in the district; the average advantage of incumbents in strategic quality was +2.15, while the incumbent’s advantage on the personal-quality index averaged +.52. As these data suggest, most incumbents enjoyed an advantage over the candidate challenging them, with only 5% of incumbents facing a challenger rated higher on strategic quality, whereas 31% of incumbents were confronted by a challenger rated more highly in their personal quality.

The results in Table 1 are consistent with the idea that incumbents enjoy a valence advantage over their challengers, and suggest the potential importance of distinguishing

between the types of valence advantages between candidates.¹⁵ As we might expect, district informants saw incumbents as having an especially strong advantage in strategic skills and resources that are necessary to wage an effective campaign. Incumbents' advantages in personal qualities are also evident, but they are much less pronounced than on the strategic dimension of valence.

IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS AND EXTREMITY IN 2006

The informant placements of the candidates in their districts along with the survey self-placement data by constituents allow us to map the ideological locations of candidates and constituencies prior to the 2006 elections (see Figure 1). Incumbents and challengers are above the line; constituency means are below the line. Although the average district is moderate, just to the right of center, and the average (mean) incumbent occupies almost exactly the same position on the left-right scale, it is clear from the figure that these averages hide a substantial difference between the parties, both among candidates and between districts or partisan majorities in districts held by each party.

(Figure 1)

The placements of Democratic and Republican incumbents indicate a substantial amount of polarization between the two parties in the House, a result in keeping with the observations of other scholars. Much as Burden found with his survey data on incumbents and challengers in the 2000 election, the average Democratic challenger is more moderate than the average Democratic incumbent relative to the center point on the

¹⁵ The distinction between strategic and personal qualities is confirmed in a factor analysis of all of the items in Table 1 (conducted on informants' perceptions by the party of the candidate). Two distinct dimensions emerge in a principal components analysis (varimax rotation), with the personal quality items loading on the first dimension (mean loading = .890) and the strategic items loading on the second (mean loading = .772).

left-right scale, and by a similar margin, Republican challengers were less extreme in their conservatism than the typical Republican incumbent.

The constituency placements make clear, however, that the moderation of challengers relative to incumbents should be considered in the context of the districts in which they compete. Districts represented by Democrats are almost a full unit more liberal than districts represented by Republicans, although it is clear that districts are on average much more moderate than their representatives. Republican challengers ran in more liberal districts than those represented by Republican incumbents, and Democratic challengers sought to unseat Republican incumbents in relatively conservative districts. As a result, challengers in both parties were more moderate in an absolute sense on the liberal-conservative scale, but they were no closer to the districts in which they competed than incumbents were to their districts. In other words, relative to their districts, challengers were as extreme in their positions as incumbents.

It is reasonable to suppose that incumbents are especially likely to represent the policy positions of those in their districts from their party. The polarization between district partisan majorities is almost as great as it is between the parties in Congress, which suggests that a large portion of the partisan polarization in Congress reflects constituency-based interests.

Figure 1 masks considerable district-level variation in the positions both of candidates and districts, as Figure 2 indicates (cf. Ansolabehere et al 2000; Burden 2004). The scatter plots in Figure 2 present another picture of the polarization between the parties along with the tendency of candidates to reflect district interests. The upper line depicts the relationship between Republican candidates and their districts; the lower line

the relationship between Democratic candidates and their districts. The distance between the lines reflects the difference between the parties' candidates in the 2006 elections. At the same time, both lines slope upward, indicating a significant tendency of Republican and Democratic candidates to adopt more conservative positions as the districts in which they compete become more conservative.

As strong as the differences between the parties are, the differences among candidates within the parties are also substantial. The differences in the intercepts for the regression lines describing the relationship between district opinion and candidate positions within each party indicates average difference in candidate positions between the parties.¹⁶ This difference amounts to 2.88 points on the liberal-conservative dimension. The expected difference between the Republican candidate competing in the most liberal district and the Republican running in the most conservative district is 1.87 points, while the comparable difference among Democratic candidates is 2.38 points. These differences, while not as great as the average distance between the parties, are nonetheless quite large, and reflect the strength of district preferences on candidate position-taking.

(Figure 2)

THE IMPACT OF VALENCE ON CANDIDATE POSITIONS

We can now consider the relationship between candidate valence and the ideological positions candidates take relative to the district. Our dependent variable is the

¹⁶ The OLS equation for Democratic candidates is:
 $\text{PredictedDemPosition} = -1.316 + 1.189 * \text{DistrictPosition}$ (t -ratio for the slope = 4.07);
for Republican candidates it is:
 $\text{PredictedRepPosition} = 1.561 + .934 * \text{DistrictPosition}$ (t -ratio for the slope = 3.94).

candidate's proximity to the ideological position of the district, computed as the absolute difference between informants' placements of the candidate in the district and the CCES core-sample self-placement on the liberal-conservatism scale, aggregated to the district level. The principal independent variables of interest are relative strategic and personal quality scores, computed as the algebraic difference between the ratings of incumbent and the challenger in the district. We conduct separate analyses for incumbents and challengers because incumbents are likely to have less leeway in adopting an ideological position in response to a challenger since they are already in office constrained with an established record that may constrain their flexibility. Challengers, in contrast, typically do not have the same constraints. Moreover, conditions in advance of the 2006 election may have favored challengers who were more or less extreme, depending on factors specific to each district. Thus challenger placement may reflect who enters and who does not as much as it reflects strategic decision-making by a given challenger about where to locate on the left-right continuum. We impose controls for the ideological extremity of the district on the grounds that the preferences of districts with relatively extreme positions may be more apparent than in moderate districts,¹⁷ the party of the incumbent, and, in the analysis of challenger district proximity, the proximity of the incumbent to the district.¹⁸

(Table 2)

¹⁷ Several factors may account for such an effect, including the possibility that more extreme districts are more homogenous with respect to their partisanship (the correlation between district partisanship and district ideological preferences is .82), and that signals from relative extreme districts are more consistent than those from more moderate and heterogeneous districts.

¹⁸ We assume that challengers react to incumbents in their ideological placement rather than the other way around.

Consider first the analysis of incumbents' ideological proximity to their districts. It is not relative strategic quality that has an impact. Instead, the greater incumbents' personal advantage over their challenger, the closer the incumbent was to district preferences. This suggests a strong and substantively interesting effect of the personal-quality dimension of valence on policy representation, and the absence of an effect of purely strategic advantages. The observed variation in relative personal quality is substantial with a range of +/- two standard deviations amounting to approximately 5 points from the most disadvantaged to the most advantaged incumbent in personal quality. By the coefficient in Table 2, this would mean that an incumbent with a high personal quality relative to her challenger would be almost a full unit closer to her constituency than a colleague who was facing a challenger of stronger relative personal quality.¹⁹ It appears from this result that, as Groseclose's (2001) model contends, incumbents with a valence advantage are more representative of the policy preferences of their districts than incumbents without a non-policy advantage. Far from shirking in their policy representation, the stronger incumbents' personal quality advantage was the closer they were to their districts' ideological preferences. By separating the strategic from the personal-quality dimensions of valence, moreover, we can see that it is the dimension of valence most valued by voters and closest to what we mean by the non-policy bases of representation that has this effect.²⁰

The effects of incumbents' valence advantage on challengers' proximity to their districts are strongly in the opposite direction. Again, the effects we observe are on the

¹⁹ An incumbent two standard deviations below the mean (+.52) in relative personal quality would be rated -1.92 or almost two units lower than her challenger in personal quality.

²⁰ The two dimensions of valence are highly correlated ($r = .73$). When we enter them one at a time in the incumbent analysis, personal quality advantage retains its significant effect, while strategic advantage does not have a statistically significant impact on district proximity.

personal-quality dimension of valence rather than strategic quality, as challengers are pushed away from district preferences with increased disadvantage in personal quality. Put another way, as challengers approach in strength the personal qualities of the incumbents they are attempting to unseat, their ideological proximity to their district increases. Our results again support Groseclose's conclusion that by increasing the importance of valence advantage, the candidate with the greater reputation for personal quality forces the disadvantaged candidate to adopt a relatively extreme position as the only way to distinguish himself from the incumbent, in an attempt to make the election about policy difference rather than about valence.

EFFECTS ON THE OUTCOME OF THE 2006 ELECTIONS

Our investigation into the policy and personal quality dimensions of representation raises the question of whether these factors aid in explaining the 2006 election outcomes. While we have found a relationship between valence and policy positioning, it remains to be seen whether we can uncover evidence that the electorate responds to the choices candidates present on these two dimensions in ways that help reinforce the links between constituents and representatives. Table 3 provides an analysis of incumbents' vote share. We include incumbent and challenger proximity to district preferences on the liberal-conservative scale, the party of the incumbent, the partisan makeup of the district, as well as the strategic and personal quality of the incumbent relative to the challenger.²¹

(Table 3)

²¹ District partisanship is the mean district party identification from the Polimetrix core survey; relative strategic quality is the challenger's strategic-quality index score subtracted from the incumbent's index score; relative personal quality is incumbent's personal-quality index – challenger's personal quality score.

While we do not observe an effect of incumbent proximity to the district, there is a strong effect of challenger proximity consistent with the strategy anticipated in the Groseclose model. Challengers who take positions further removed from the district are rewarded with a greater share of the vote (a reduced share to the incumbent) compared with challengers who take positions closer to the district. There is about a three-point range in challenger-district proximity (from very close to 0 to just over 3 units on the liberal-conservative scale), so the expected vote gain for challengers who differentiate themselves in their ideological positions is substantial. There are a variety of ways we can specify the analysis, all of which show this effect. For example, we observe it by employing a relative-proximity measure (incumbent proximity – challenger proximity), as well as when we use a simple candidate-difference measure, or candidate-extremism measures. All specifications indicate that the challenger is rewarded for creating ideological distance from the incumbent, and all indicate that it is the *challenger's* ideological position that is operative, not the incumbent's position. In future work, we intend to explore in detail the mechanisms that produce this effect, but for now it appears that the Groseclose model captures the underlying logic: the valence-disadvantaged candidate can attract support, presumably from his or her ideological base in the district, by moving *away* from the incumbent and the district center.

In contrast to the effects of strategic and personal quality on candidate positioning we observe a strong effect of relative strategic quality, and no independent impact of relative personal quality on November vote share. Further analysis (not shown) that disaggregates incumbent from challenger strategic quality indicates that this is due primarily to the effects of variation in the strategic quality of challengers rather than

incumbents. The variation in the strategic quality of challengers is noticeably higher than the variation among incumbents,²² which makes sense since skilled and experienced challengers are strategic about which races they enter, whereas incumbents have succeeded in winning at least one previous election to the House.

Does the absence of an effect of relative personal quality in Table 3 mean that personal-quality differences have no effect on vote share? Equation 2 shows that when we drop relative strategic quality from the analysis, relative personal quality has a strong and significant impact on vote share. We see this as evidence consistent with the idea that candidates' strategic quality can mediate the impact of personal quality. The two dimensions of quality are correlated ($r = .70$), which is an indication that candidates' ability to attract strategic resources depends in part on their personal qualities, which contributors, fundraisers, and others close to the campaign are in a position to assess. The analysis in Table 3 supports the conclusion that personal quality affects vote share, but does so indirectly, through its impact on strategic quality.²³

Figure 3 employs equation 2 to depict the effect of differences in personal quality on incumbent vote share for challengers who are relatively close to the district with challengers who are distant from district ideological preferences. As the graph shows, no matter how close the challenger is to the district, incumbents' vote share increase as their personal quality advantage over the challenger increases. However, incumbent vote share drops (challengers' vote share increases) when challengers are more distant from

²² The standard deviation of incumbent strategic quality is .84; for challenger strategic quality it is 1.05.

²³ When we disaggregate relative personal quality into separate measures of incumbent and challenger personal quality, it is incumbent personal quality that affects vote share, rather than challenger personal quality. This result is consistent with other work in which we show that among challengers, variation in strategic quality is of primary importance, while among incumbents it is variation in personal quality that is politically significant (Stone, Hadley, Peterson, Maestas, Maisel 2006).

the district median.²⁴ Thus, challengers who differentiate themselves from incumbents in the ideological positions they take win a larger share of the vote than those who follow a strategy of convergence.

(Figure 3)

The vote share candidates capture is one definition of the election outcome, although it can be argued that the probability of winning the seat is of greater interest. Moreover, it need not be the case in single-member districts that the same factors that influence vote shares also affect the probability of victory. For example, a strategy by challengers disadvantaged on valence grounds to differentiate themselves ideologically from the incumbent might win votes from the challenger's partisan/ideological base by elevating the importance of ideology in voters' decision making, but it might not enhance their chances of victory, especially if their partisan constituency is a small minority in the district.

In the 2006 elections, there was a strong national tide against the Republican Party, which resulted in no Democratic-held seats switching to the Republicans, while 30 seats held by the GOP before the elections flipped to the Democrats. Whereas only 5 of the seats that fell to the Democrats were included in our random sample of 99 districts, by over-sampling open and competitive districts, we were able to include 27 of the districts lost by Republicans in 2006. As a result of the limited turnover in the random sample, our analysis of the probability of seat change in Table 4 includes the over-sampled districts as a supplement to the random sample. We have restricted the analysis to

²⁴ We classify as "close to the district" challengers who are two standard deviations closer to the district than the mean; and as "distant from the district" challengers who are two standard deviations further from their districts' ideological preferences.

Republican-held seats since no Democratic seats changed hands, and we have dropped open seats from the analysis.²⁵

(Table 4)

Table 4 shows that valence and differences in district partisanship offer the best explanation for Republicans' seat losses in 2006. Once again, strategic-quality differences dominate when that dimension of valence is included, but the effect of personal quality on the probability of the incumbent losing is mediated by strategic differences. Challenger proximity to the district does not reach statistical significance in Equation 1, although it does meet the one-tailed standard in Equation 2. Thus, it appears that challengers who are distant from the district do not necessarily have improved chances of victory, even though they increase their vote share.

CONCLUSION

Questions may be raised about the informant-based measures that are the basis of our study. A significant strength of the informant measures is that they permit us to measure the strategic and personal dimensions of candidate quality, a distinction that appears to be important in the results. In addition, the ability to place constituencies and candidates on the same metric enables us to compute proximity scores and map the locations of candidates and constituencies on the same scale. Despite these advantages, there are potential problems. Perhaps the most difficult relates to possible endogeneity in the relationship between perceptions of candidate placement and quality. One possibility is that incumbents who are perceived as relatively moderate are, because of their moderation, rated more highly on personal quality. The opposite could also be true, with

²⁵ Including open seats does not change the substantive conclusions.

perceptions of placement affected by quality judgments. This is a difficult issue to address given the limitations of the data, although in future work we intend to pursue alternative measures of ideological placement to limit potential bias in our results. For now, we are reassured in part by the consistency of our findings across several tests, and by the fact that the results showing that more extreme challengers win larger vote shares cut against conventional wisdom that most informants probably believe. Thus, if there are endogeneity effects in the incumbent-side results, the same problem would probably weaken, rather than produce the challenger-side effects we have observed. While there no doubt are limitations to informant-based measures, we see it as a strategy with the potential to add to our understanding of congressional elections and representation, provided they are employed with appropriate caution.

Using our measures of ideological placement and candidate valence or quality, we have found support for the claim that valence advantages lead to moderation relative to the district, while valence disadvantages lead to more extreme positions. Specifically, the relative personal qualities of the candidates affect how closely to their districts candidates locate. This finding is supported by our analysis of election outcomes, which illustrates the effectiveness of these strategies. Challengers were able to increase their vote shares by moving to more extreme positions. Although the effects of personal quality are mediated by strategic quality, the results reinforce the conclusion that the personal qualities of candidates are important to our understanding of political representation.

Because constituents cannot monitor every decision of their representative, they must trust that their representative is acting in their best interest. Trust is more firmly grounded in personal quality than it is in strategic quality since a strategic-valence

advantage may stimulate a false sense of trust by constituents. The good news is that the strong effects of personal quality suggest that voters are not misplacing their trust, as personal quality encourages more proximate ideological representation. Additionally, the more competitive the challenger is on personal-quality grounds, the more candidates converge on district preferences. This again highlights the fact that the two dimensions of representation are not at odds and voters do not face a fundamental tension between their interest in policy and the personal quality of their representatives.

Our findings offer additional insight into the polarization between political parties. Contrary to the argument that polarization is created by incumbents serving either themselves or their parties, our results show that incumbents take extreme positions because they are elected by relatively extreme constituencies. The resulting polarization in Congress, then, should be attributed not to politicians shirking, but to the fact they represent polarized constituency interests. Within the framework of polarization in constituencies (especially the polarization of the two parties within districts), the valence factors a moderating counterforce that may reassure those who see party polarization as undermining processes of representation in U.S. politics.

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Table 1. Strategic and Personal Quality Ratings for Incumbents and Challengers, 2006.

	Incumbents	Challengers
<i>Strategic Quality Items</i>		
Ability to raise funds from others	1.77	-.70
Ability to fund own campaign	.80	-.99
Current name recognition in district	2.08	-1.17
Ability to attract attention	1.31	-.94
Ability to be persuasive in public	1.15	-.26
Ability to run a professional campaign	1.48	-.43
Overall strength as a campaigner	1.33	-.37
<i>Personal Quality Items</i>		
Personal integrity	.76	.64
Ability to work well with other leaders	1.01	.12
Ability to find solutions to problems	.39	.12
Competence	.75	.38
Grasp of the issues	.96	.30
Qualifications to hold public office	.92	.10
Overall strength as a public servant	.66	.10
Strategic quality index	1.42	-.69
Personal quality index	.78	.24
<i>N</i>	(90)	(81)

Note: Entries are mean informant ratings aggregated by district on 7-point scales ranging from “extremely weak” (-3) to “extremely strong” (+3). Open seats dropped from analysis.

Figure 1. Ideological Map before 2006 Elections

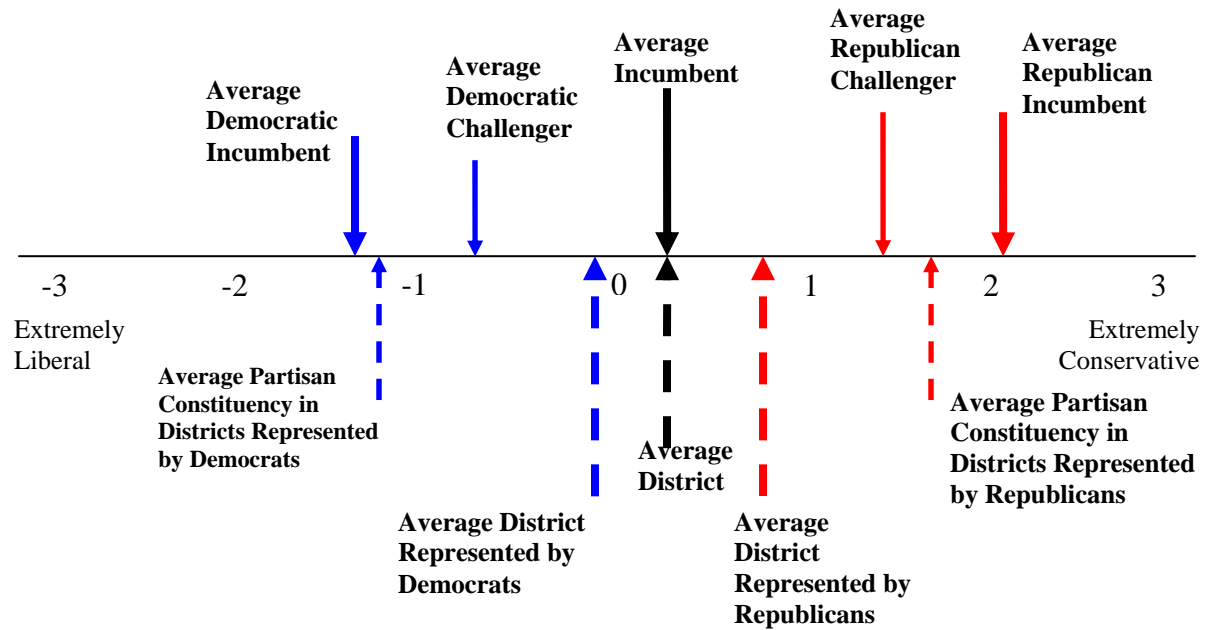


Figure 2.

Candidate Ideology by District Ideology 2006

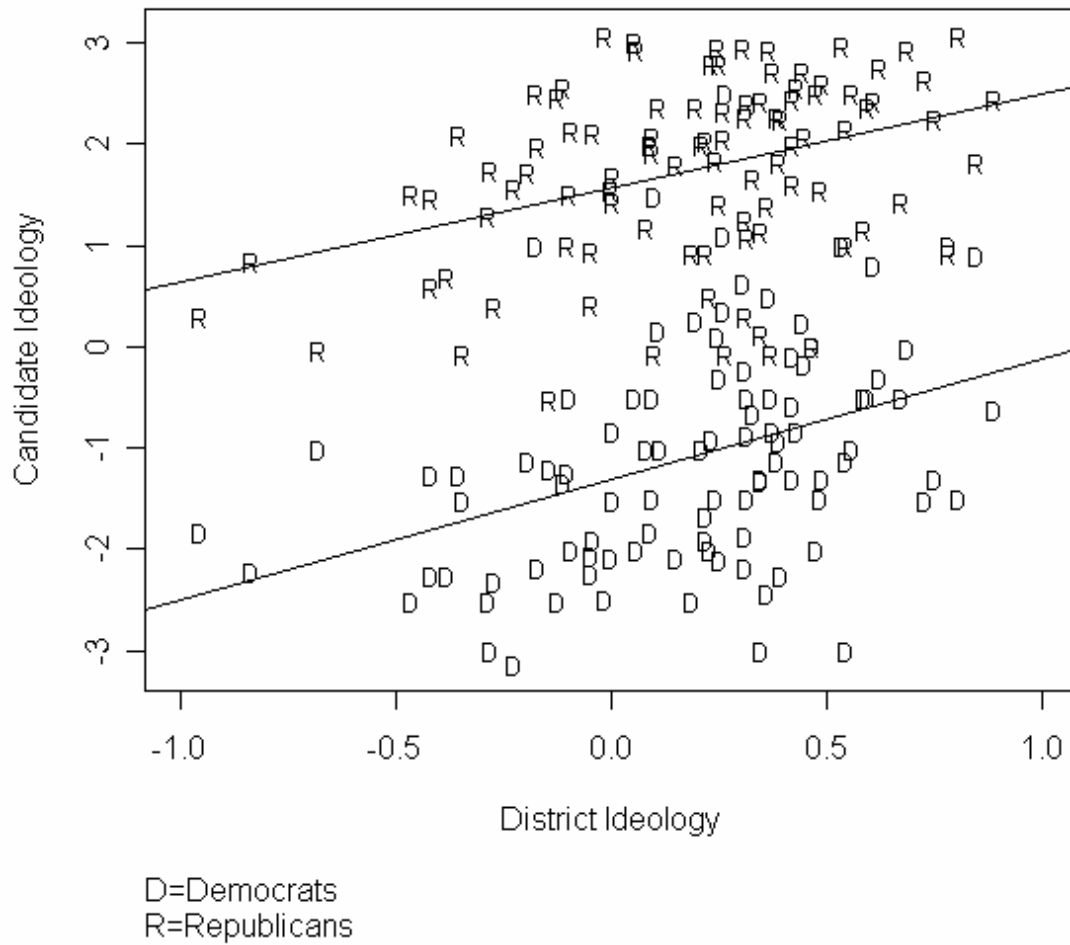


Table 2. OLS Analysis of Effect of Valence Advantage on Ideological Proximity to the District among Incumbents and Challengers, 2006 (standard errors)

	Incumbents	Challengers Excluding Open Seats
District Extremism	-.680* (.394)	-.695* (.362)
Incumbent's Proximity to District	--	-.128 (.103)
Democratic Incumbent	-.190 (.172)	.257 (.157)
Incumbent's Relative Strategic Advantage	.096 (.090)	-.028 (.082)
Incumbent's Relative Personal Advantage	-.197** (.092)	.260*** (.066)
Constant	1.892*** (.242)	1.688*** (.292)
<i>F</i>	2.34*	5.66***
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.063	.226
<i>N</i>	81	81

*** $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$. Open seats dropped from analysis.

Table 3. OLS Analysis of Effects of Policy and Valence Representation on Incumbents' Vote Share, 2006 (standard errors)

	(1)	(2)
Incumbent proximity to district	-.230 (.726)	.070 (.818)
Challenger proximity to district	-3.024*** (.816)	-3.443*** (.918)
Democratic incumbent	10.804*** (1.136)	10.086*** (1.274)
District partisanship (coded to reflect party of incumbent)	9.115*** (1.490)	10.701*** (1.641)
Relative strategic quality	2.775*** (.592)	--
Relative personal quality	.367 (.685)	2.615*** (.554)
Constant	53.521*** (2.118)	58.297*** (2.101)
<i>F</i>	31.57***	26.16***
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.696	.611
<i>N</i>	81	81

*** $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$. Open seats dropped from the analysis.

Table 4. Probit Analysis of Probability of Republican Incumbent Losing, 2006

	(1)	(2)
Incumbent proximity to district	-.049 (.273)	-.030 (.249)
Challenger proximity to district	.442 (.303)	.528* (.277)
District partisanship	-1.087* (.598)	-1.412** (.551)
Relative strategic quality	-.569*** (.195)	--
Relative personal quality	-.135 (.211)	-.448** (.174)
Constant	-.152 (.790)	-.971 (.678)
Log likelihood	-29.726	-34.734
Pseudo R^2	.278	.157
N	68	68

*** $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$. Open seats dropped from the analysis.

NOTE: All seats held by Republican incumbents included in the analysis (i.e., including the over-sampled competitive districts).

Figure 3.

