

The Contemporary Presidency: The Sixth Year Curse

COLLEEN J. SHOGAN

George Mason University

There is a prevailing pattern of ill-fated events that routinely unfold during a president's sixth consecutive year in the White House. Republican strategist Kevin Phillips called the tendency of the president's party to lose seats in a midterm election the "sixth year itch." The term is actually an understatement. Due to the fact that sixth years are typically filled with scandals, economic depressions, and weakened political coalitions, it is more accurate to refer to this phenomenon as a full-fledged "curse." A historical analysis of the past seven reelected presidents reveals the problems faced in sixth years of office. Although every president since Ulysses S. Grant has suffered from some version of the "sixth year curse," its negative effects vary in intensity. The article concludes with an evaluation of George W. Bush's leadership and cautiously predicts how he will attempt to handle the difficulties and challenges of his administration's sixth year.

Near the end of 1958, Dwight Eisenhower relaxed for a weekend at the White House with his usual gang of friends. At breakfast, he remarked that 1958 had been a "terrible year" and described it as the "worst of his life" (Ambrose 1984, 486). If Eisenhower could have looked into the future or had consulted the history books, he might not have fretted about his difficulties in 1958. In the past century and a half, all two-term presidents have suffered from political turmoil in their sixth year of office, and the ensuing melee has become known as the "sixth year itch." The "itch" typically refers to the midterm losses that the president's party suffers in the House of Representatives and the Senate, but a president's troubles are not confined to the electoral arena. In fact, the term "sixth year itch" is an understatement. Instead, it is more accurate to describe the problems faced by reelected presidents in their sixth years as an unavoidable "curse" that varies in intensity.

Colleen J. Shogan is assistant professor of government and politics at George Mason University. She is an APSA Congressional Fellow in 2005-2006 and her book on presidential moral rhetoric is forthcoming from Texas A&M University Press in 2006.

Presidential scholars have done little systematic analysis to determine how presidential administrations evolve, particularly from first to second terms. This article examines a specific block of time—the sixth years of reelected presidents—and finds that the worrisome lore surrounding this period is justified. To assess the scope and characteristics of the curse, I analyze the sixth years of seven two-term presidents and compare the challenges they faced.¹ Using these findings and observations, the implications of this persistent phenomenon will be applied to the upcoming sixth year of George W. Bush's presidency.

Components of the Curse

An overview of the past 150 years of presidential history reveals that the problems occurring in the sixth years of reelected, consecutive term presidents can be divided into three categories: scandals, weakened political coalitions, and midterm electoral defeat. Not all presidents experience difficulties in every category, but each chief executive from Ulysses S. Grant to Bill Clinton endured at least two of the three types of challenges in their sixth years. Although midterm electoral losses are a significant part of the sixth year curse, they are not the whole story. The president's party typically loses seats in the House and Senate in sixth-year midterms *because* the previous ten months have been a political disaster. In this sense, focusing attention on sixth-year electoral losses fails to examine the heart of the problem, which resides in the political disasters that portend any midterm losses.

Scandals

Scandals are a routine component of presidential sixth years. Of the seven presidents analyzed, five faced scandals in their sixth years of office. The seriousness of the scandals varied considerably. On the milder side was Grant, who weathered one of his more minor controversies in 1874. Grant's Treasury secretary, William A. Richardson, was exposed for funneling money through a government contract to collect taxes. The implication of bribery led to the resignation of Secretary Richardson, and complicated Grant's decision regarding the widely popular inflation bill that sat on his desk for signature. Given the firestorm surrounding the Treasury Department, Grant's remaining cabinet members urged him to sign the bill, which he intensely disliked. With congressional elections around the corner, his confidantes emphasized the political effects of his decision (Smith 2001, 579). Nonetheless, Grant could not bring himself to sign the bill and suffered severe losses in the midterms. Dwight Eisenhower also experienced a minor scandal in his sixth year. An oversight committee in the House found that his chief of staff, Sherman Adams, had taken gifts from a manufacturer who faced several

1. The presidents examined were Ulysses S. Grant, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton. I did not include Cleveland because his elected terms were not consecutive. I also did not include vice presidents (such as Theodore Roosevelt or Harry Truman) who succeeded to the presidency for their first term of office.

regulatory investigations (Pach and Richardson 1991, 180). Due to his supposed liberal influence on Eisenhower and his abrupt way of dealing with members of Congress, fellow Republicans did not rush to help the embattled chief of staff. Adams eventually resigned, but the damage had already been done. The Democrats made good use of the Adams controversy in the 1958 midterm campaign.

Three presidents faced more serious scandals in their sixth years. Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton suffered incidents that threatened to undermine or end their presidencies. Nixon was forced to resign from office in 1974 due to the confirmation of his involvement in the Watergate burglary. At the end of 1986, the Iran Contra scandal broke, leaving the remainder of Reagan's second term politically damaged. For Bill Clinton, 1998 began with accusations of an affair with a White House intern and ended with articles of impeachment. If that were not enough for his sixth year, Clinton also endured an embarrassing deposition in the Paula Jones civil case, a videotaped grand jury testimony, and the withdrawal of his blood by Navy physicians for a DNA sample. In *My Life*, Clinton called 1998 the "strangest year" of his presidency (2004, 771). Both Reagan and Clinton experienced political paralysis during their scandals. Reagan understood the severity of the situation; he wrote in his diary on November 12, 1986 that the "media looks like it's trying to create another Watergate" (Reagan 1990, 528). By Thanksgiving, he confessed that he felt "roasted" just like a turkey (Reagan 1990, 532).

Although the evidence certainly suggests the presence of a curse, almost all of the scandals (with the exception of Clinton) can be attributed to errors in executive management that existed before the president's sixth year. As with all of the controversies he faced, Grant allowed his Treasury secretary to stay too long after the accusations had been substantiated. In his typical hidden-hand style, Eisenhower sent Vice President Nixon to nudge Adams into resigning (Greenstein 1994, 65). In this particular instance, Eisenhower's roundabout approach generated considerable political damage for the Republicans. The seeds of Watergate can be traced back to Nixon's ironclad vision of an excessively hierarchical presidency that pursued policy goals through administrative action and control (Milkis and Nelson 2003, 332). Finally, the origin of Reagan's troubles with Iran Contra stemmed from his administration's casual attitude toward the individuals working for the National Security Council, who were often left to "do their own thing" (Speakes 1988, 265). Consequently, the sixth year of a presidency is a ripe time for a scandal to break because existing errors in management that have festered for five years have had ample time to create crises of governance. For this reason, sixth-year scandals are not inevitable (Wilson and FDR escaped unscathed) but are an anticipated ingredient of the proverbial curse.

Weakened Political Coalition

By their sixth years, most two-term presidents confront breaches within their network of support. In most instances, weaknesses emerge from fissures in the president's own party coalition. For FDR, the politically impoverished state of affairs he faced in 1938 can be partially attributed to the aggressiveness of his 1937 court-packing plan, which failed badly. Democratic members of Congress were tired of the bullying from the

White House and acting as a proverbial rubber stamp for Roosevelt's New Deal (Burns 1956, 339). Furthermore, the poor state of the economy also magnified FDR's troubles, which culminated in the legislative failure of his ambitious executive branch reorganization in 1938. But several policy achievements—the Fair Labor Standards Act and the naval expansion bill—gave Roosevelt hope that he had not lost his touch. These policy successes provided FDR with a false sense of hubris, leading him to decide in June that he would intervene in the political primaries of the upcoming congressional midterm elections. The plan backfired when his opponents classified his electoral activity as a “purge” effort, which beckoned images of dictatorship. The fact that FDR had not announced his intentions for 1940 contributed to the negative public perception of his midterm intervention (Davis 1993, 295).

The ease with which FDR's opposition pigeonholed his activities as a purge is telling in itself. Sixth-year presidents are often vulnerable to such a pitfall—labels are often assigned to them. Consequently, presidents in this situation are forced to engage in a defensive strategy. Roosevelt's electoral interference was an offensive overture to counteract this tendency, but the ability of his opponents to turn the tables on him so quickly indicates that Roosevelt's political coalition had weakened considerably.

Woodrow Wilson took a different approach than Franklin Roosevelt in his sixth year. Due to the ongoing war, Wilson minimized his role as a party leader. Instead, in May of 1918 he announced, “Politics is adjourned.” This was in keeping with Wilson's desire to attenuate his attachments with the Democratic party and forge a new progressive coalition in Congress (Stid 1998, 139). Overt partisan leadership was out of the question for Wilson, as it would be seen as “playing politics” during a time of war. However, Wilson's rhetorical announcement of a political cease-fire did not mean that one actually existed. Wilson suffered criticisms of his decisions as commander in chief, and faced at least five major congressional investigations concerning his conduct of the war, with many Democrats participating (Livermore 1966, 68). In a particularly bold move, Democratic Senator George Chamberlain proposed to create a “war cabinet” consisting of three civilians to oversee the war's operations. Wilson fought back and ended up gaining new reorganization powers, but found it increasingly difficult to marshal support within his party to protect his independence as commander in chief. Much akin to FDR, Wilson's partisan allies in Congress were tired of the White House telling them how to legislate (Stid 1998, 129).

These formidable challenges to his executive authority led Wilson to deviate from his earlier policy of nonintervention in congressional midterm elections. In an abrupt shift, the president who had declared the adjournment of politics began to campaign for Democratic candidates in October 1918. Of course, Wilson's public endorsement of the Democrats was too little, too late, and the president found himself saddled with Republican Henry Cabot Lodge after the election. Wilson's equivocation on the role of party leadership during his sixth year of office proved no more successful than FDR's more aggressive, stringent posture. Wilson's constitutional position—as commander in chief—did not minimize the political impact of the sixth year curse. Wilson came to realize that the “above politics” approach was not sufficient to weather the storm. By the time he understood the situation fully, the 1918 midterms were already a lost cause.

By his sixth year, Eisenhower also endured strained relations with his fellow partisans in Congress. The 1957 budget had pushed the fracture between Eisenhower's wing of the party and the Old Guard Republicans to the fore, with the president insisting on the continued funding of welfare state programs. In turn, the Old Guard punished Eisenhower by cutting the president's proposed levels for foreign and defense spending. The 1957 battle showed that Eisenhower had not been successful in seizing control of the Republican party and imposing his ideology on it (Pach and Richardson 1991, 169).

By the beginning of 1958, Eisenhower's public approval had dropped to its lowest level of his presidency, 52 percent. Eisenhower's troubles with Congress continued in 1958. The president ended up vetoing the farm bill, which he thought was too expensive. However, Eisenhower seemed to have a keen sense about the tenuous nature of his political authority. Although he took a stand on the farm bill due to his "political principles," he did accede to Congress on the creation of NASA and Alaskan statehood (Pach and Richardson 1991, 180). In his diary, Eisenhower mused that he thought the demands placed upon him in his second term would be fewer than in the first. Instead, the opposite was the case: "The demands that I 'do something' seem to grow" (Ferrell 1981, 347). Eisenhower's willingness to go along with several congressional initiatives in 1958 enabled him to fulfill the expectation that he needed to "do something" in his second term. As part of an overall political strategy for chalking up policy achievements during a notoriously difficult time, a beleaguered Eisenhower prudently allowed Congress to take the lead on several policy initiatives.

In contrast, both Reagan and Clinton somehow managed to maintain control of their parties in the face of sixth-year adversity. In the months before Iran Contra, Reagan found the Senate Republicans much more independent minded (Hook 1986, 2755) but still managed to prevail on close votes. Accomplishments included tax reform, environmental legislation, and an immigration bill. In particular, the tax reform legislation provided the Reagan administration with a unifying agenda for its second term.

The year 1998 was a legislative washout, because congressional Republicans believed that as support for Clinton waned, the GOP would emerge with an even stronger coalition after the midterm elections. In a miscalculated move, the GOP backed off an aggressive legislative program in 1998 (Doherty 1998, 3079). This anemic legislative strategy played into Clinton's hands, who marshaled support from his fellow partisans in Congress and the public at large. With the Lewinsky scandal brewing throughout the year, Clinton implemented a defensive posture, denying the Republicans a tax cut and eventually, his own impeachment.

By the fall of 1998, Congress had accomplished almost nothing and, with the midterm elections approaching, the Republican leadership decided they needed to compromise with Clinton on several spending bills before November. In the beginning of 1998, Clinton had worked closely with congressional Democrats to develop a policy agenda for the upcoming year and was able to achieve several of his objectives in the appropriations process due to the desperation of his adversaries (Sinclair 2000, 89-92). Although it is a stretch to conclude that Clinton emerged on top in 1998, he did manage to maintain party discipline, defeat his opponents at their own game, and sustain political support among his base (Sapiro and Canon 2000, 182-85). Even though the sixth

year curse left Clinton politically wounded and his presidency permanently tarnished, his ability to overcome his considerable political difficulties and score several modest policy victories is noteworthy.

Midterm Elections

Of course, the most frequently discussed and feared characteristic of the sixth year curse is the president’s party losses during the November midterm elections. The presence of strong presidential “surge and decline” effects has been well documented (Campbell 1991). In presidential election years, a party’s vote positively affects congressional election results, with subsequent declines in the following midterm elections. Historically, a sitting president’s party has not performed well in the midterms. But should reelected presidents reserve significant concern for their sixth-year midterm elections? Or should presidents follow the advice of political analyst Stu Rothenberg (2005), who recently concluded that the sixth year itch is nothing more than a “figment of the imagination”?

Figures 1 and 2 depict presidential party losses in midterm elections only.² The years in which a reelected president is in his sixth consecutive year of office are marked on the line graph. Because the aftermath of Watergate certainly impacted the congress-

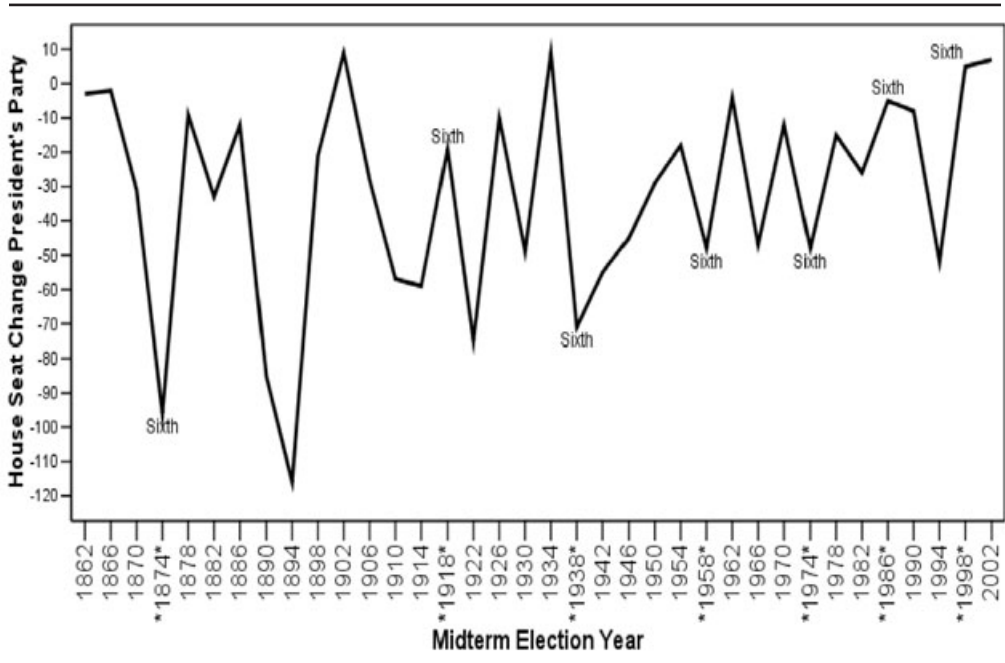


FIGURE 1. Presidential Party House Losses, Midterm Elections.

2. For the data used to compile Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1, see Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin (2000, 54).

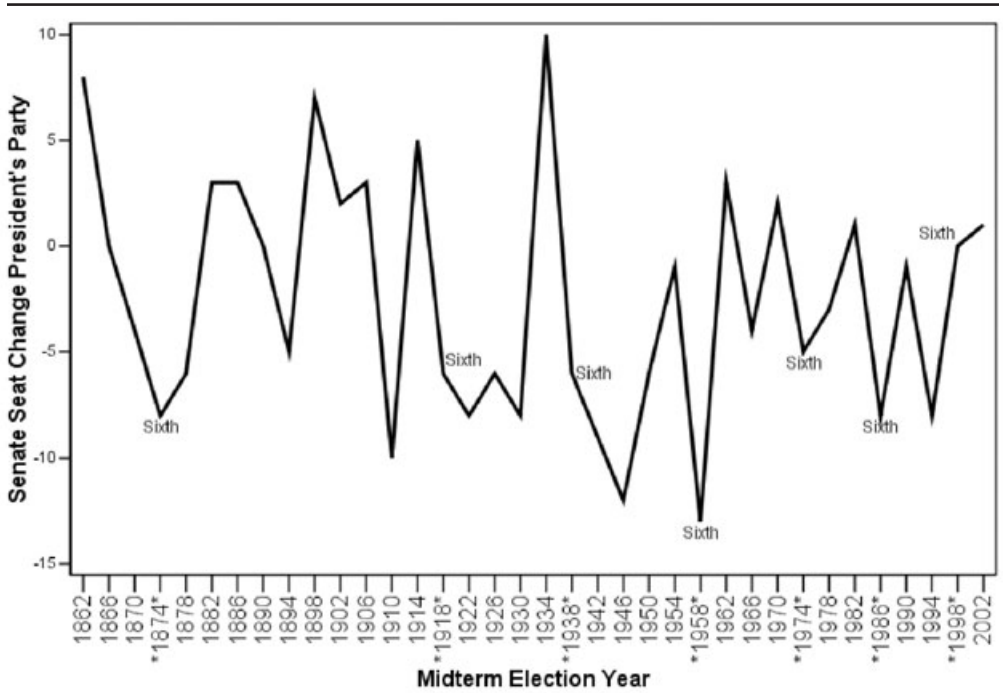


FIGURE 2. Presidential Party Senate Losses, Midterm Elections.

sional elections, 1974 was included as a sixth-year midterm, although Nixon had resigned from office on August 8. The data demonstrate that sixth-year-curse midterms are hard on the president's party. In particular, Senate losses are much more pronounced, with the exception of an even draw in 1998. For example, Reagan only lost five Republican House seats, but lost eight in the Senate in 1986, along with Republican control. Table 1 provides a more precise empirical overview of the congressional losses sustained by reelected presidents. In their sixth years, presidents lose approximately ten more House seats than in other midterm elections. Given its smaller size, the curse is even more potent in the Senate, with sixth-year presidents losing about five more seats in comparison to non-sixth-year midterms. In the past 150 years, no sixth-year reelected president has ever gained seats in the Senate for his party.

The reason why presidents lose more seats in the House and Senate during sixth-year midterms is related to evaluations of the president's political party. Abramowitz, Cover, and Norpoth (1986) conclude that as evaluations of the president's party grow more negative, the president loses more seats in Congress. Negative party evaluations are due to worsened economic conditions in the second term and a drop in presidential approval. As time marches on, the electorate loses faith that the president's party can actually solve pressing national problems.

The only way a president may minimize the impact of this phenomenon is to engineer a political situation in which the electorate views the opposing party less favorably than his own. For such a scenario to occur, divided government might be necessary.

TABLE 1
Average Midterm Losses for the President's Party, 1862-2002

	<i>Average House Loss</i>	<i>Average Senate Loss</i>	<i>N</i>
Second year midterm	30.2	1.5	29
Sixth year midterm	40.3	6.6	7
Midterm average	32.2	2.5	36

Through a combination of luck and skill, Bill Clinton avoided midterm losses in 1998 by keeping his party together and profiting from poor strategic decisions on the part of the congressional Republicans to pursue the Lewinsky scandal instead of a robust policy agenda. The inability of Republicans to attract moderate voters resulted in an electoral disappointment for the GOP in 1998 (Abramowitz 1999). Even though the Democrats performed much better than anticipated, reelected presidents are typically disadvantaged in sixth-year midterm elections and may only find relief if partisan opponents fumble the ball.

The Sixth Year Curse: Can It Be Avoided?

There are numerous reasons why the sixth year curse descends upon reelected presidents. The most obvious explanations are symptomatic of the entire second term: an increased tendency on the part of the president and staffers to exhibit overconfidence, exhaustion from the first term, a paucity of new policy ideas, divisions within the president's party, dissatisfaction from the president's political base, ill-advised staffing changes at high levels, and the formation of a united opposition against the president and his program. The sixth year often gives reelected presidents considerable trouble because many of these predicaments coalesce in rapid succession and frequently cripple the administration.

It is also worth noting that unsuccessful sixth years are often preceded by difficult fifth years. Even though it was eventually repealed, a controversial 1873 congressional pay raise weakened Grant significantly. Throughout 1917, Wilson fought with Congress, including members of his own party, for control over the structure and prosecution of

the war effort. FDR's purge campaign proved unsuccessful in 1938, but this failure was preceded by the 1937 court-packing fiasco. In 1957, Eisenhower fought with Congress over the budget and severely strained relations with his fellow Republicans. Nixon's fifth year, already operating under the pall of Watergate, included the resignation of Vice President Spiro Agnew. Reagan and Clinton were the exceptions to the rule and enjoyed modest success in their fifth years. Only a few months before the Lewinsky scandal broke, Clinton signed the 1997 balanced budget deal during a Rose Garden ceremony in which Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich lavished praise on the president for "reaching out" to the other side of the aisle (Harris 2005, 263).

Of course, the interesting question is whether presidents can avoid the sixth year curse, or at least mitigate its effects. Given the overview of the past 150 years of presidential history, it is unlikely that problems can be avoided in the sixth year. However, a considerable variance among reelected presidents does exist. Eisenhower, Nixon, and Clinton saw the worst effects of the curse, while Grant, Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt endured a moderate dosage.

Reagan survived his sixth year with the least amount of damage. The onset of the Iran Contra scandal and losing Republican control of the Senate were politically devastating, but earlier in the year, Reagan accomplished the unique feat of achieving a major policy victory. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 was a "perfect storm" of sorts. Reagan's landslide election in 1984 provided him with the opportunity to push forward a national initiative that was ambitious in scope. The administration also framed tax reform in such a way that both Democrats and Republicans wanted to claim credit for the policy change. Instead of utilizing an overtly partisan approach, the competition between the parties fueled the ambition for reform. Powerful leaders in Congress, the president, Chief of Staff Don Regan, the media, and tax policy experts uniformly agreed that an overhaul of the tax code was necessary (Conlan, Wrightson, and Beam 1990). More than anything, the tax reform proposal provided Reagan's second term with a focal point and encouraged bipartisanship (Brownlee and Steurle 2003, 172). Although many of the circumstances that facilitated the passage of tax reform were certainly fortuitous, Reagan's policy success in 1986 can serve as a reminder that while the sixth year often carries a curse, it is not always fatal.

From the examples outlined above, it is evident that in second terms of office, and particularly the sixth year, a president's party leadership strategy is quite important to his success. Grant, Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Eisenhower suffered due to their inability to summon strong party leadership from the White House. On the other side of the coin, Clinton survived 1998 because of the strong partisan support he received. Because many congressional Republicans opposed his tax reform legislation, Reagan adopted a different approach. The ingenuity of Reagan's strategy was the abandonment of forming a partisan coalition to support his proposed policy. Rather, Reagan understood that his plan needed Democratic backing, and this realization contributed to the development of a broader and stronger base of popular support for aggressive reform. The bottom line is that second-term presidents need to take a hard look at their party leadership role. As Clinton demonstrated in 1998, sometimes the only viable option is to galvanize support within the party, and batten down the hatches for a protracted par-

tisan fight. But more often than not, second-term presidents are faced with complex political circumstances that may respond more favorably with a degree of subtlety. Overt partisanship almost guarantees that a unified opposition will consolidate. The political climate that results paves the way for the scandals that are a persistent feature of the sixth year curse.

The prognosis is not completely bleak for sixth-year presidents. One component of the curse, midterm electoral losses in Congress, may be waning. In 1998, Clinton actually gained seats in the House, and Reagan's losses in 1986 were largely limited to the Senate. In sixth-year House midterms, presidents have done increasingly better since FDR's disastrous loss in 1938. Due to the marked decrease in the number of swing districts, the likelihood that presidents can lose a significant portion of House seats has diminished. In 2004, only twenty-two House elections were decided by less than ten percentage points (Abramowitz 2005). Although a backlash against the sitting president is still possible, electoral change is more likely to resemble a spring shower rather than a tsunami, even in sixth-year midterms.

George W. Bush and the Sixth Year Curse

It is never an easy task to figure out the political prospects of George W. Bush. An examination of the influential factors that might affect Bush's leadership in his sixth year does not produce a clear-cut prognosis. Democrats inside the Beltway have good reasons to believe that Bush's sixth year will be a difficult one. Declining job approval ratings, the sluggish response to Hurricane Katrina, growing dissatisfaction with the Iraq War, high gasoline prices, the indictment of Republican Majority Leader Tom DeLay, and the continued perception of a struggling economy demonstrate that Bush is facing difficult times in his second term. In particular, criticisms of the administration's handling of Katrina struck Bush at his political core, raising questions about his decisiveness and leadership (Balz 2005). For most of 2005, the Republican party has been subjected to predictions of a major split, which may actually come to fruition over a defining issue in Bush's second term, the policies and spending decisions concerning the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast. It also appears the GOP may fracture on the continued occupation of Iraq, immigration, and stem cell research (Daniel 2005). Renegade senators, such as the compromising Gang of 14 and the holdouts on the John Bolton nomination, have made Bush's interactions with Congress more challenging. Finally, Bush's hallmark policy proposal of his second term—the partial privatization of Social Security—is close to entering a moribund state.

However, anyone who follows George W. Bush knows that his political reality is always much more complicated than it seems. Before Hurricane Katrina, Bush had already begun to rewrite his fifth year comeback, claiming credit for the passage of the transportation bill, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and the energy bill. Although Bush's influence on Capitol Hill is uneven at best, he does continue to benefit from the well-oiled House Republican machine, which routinely finds votes wherever it can. With the exception of Social Security, Minority Leader Nancy

Pelosi has been unable to impose an ironclad opposition to Bush's agenda; several House Democrats broke rank and voted for CAFTA, and the party has been unable to muster unified opposition to the war in Iraq.

Nonetheless, Bush's second term resurgence has its own political problems. The most recent policy achievements of the Bush administration were attained through the logrolling of pork projects, which the president previously had opposed. Allowing the earmarks was a "significant shift" in Bush's former stance (Weisman and VandeHei 2005). It appears as though Bush has taken a unique approach to leadership in his second term, perhaps learning from Eisenhower in 1958. Because he refused to endorse the level of spending contained in the farm bill, Eisenhower vetoed it out of principle (Ambrose 1984, 467) and suffered severe consequences in the fall elections. Thus far, Bush seems to have capitulated to the demands of pork-motivated congressional Republicans and has avoided drawing any meaningful "line in the sand" with his fellow partisans on the Hill.

While the politics of surrender has provided Bush with some legislative success in his fifth year, it is questionable whether this strategy can carry him through the dreaded sixth year. Given the tightened fiscal reality imposed by Katrina, logrolling will be more restrained. Even if funds are available for additional projects, the problem is that the legislative tactics Bush has employed in his fifth year will not work on a substantively complex and ideologically contentious issue such as the overhaul of the Social Security system (Ornstein 2005). The notion that Social Security reform will follow in the wake of CAFTA and the transportation bill is unlikely. One remaining option might involve forging an alliance with the moderates in the Senate. But nothing in Bush's leadership since September 11 suggests that he will pursue this route. Instead, a change in legislative strategy of that magnitude would require Bush to revisit his gubernatorial days in Texas.

Of course, the most dreaded component of the sixth year curse is the midterm elections. If the Bush administration fails to follow through on the promises made to reconstruct New Orleans and surrounding areas, suffers a notable scandal such as an intelligence leak, or continues to find itself politically hampered by the unpopularity of Iraq's occupation, there is no doubt that the president's party could lose seats in both houses of Congress in November. Furthermore, the indictment of Tom DeLay is a considerable blow to the Republican machine, given the majority leader's reputation for masterminding electoral victories.

The Cindy Sheehan controversy indicates that Bush's opposition may have the opportunity to define him with considerable ease, a sure-fire sign of political vulnerability. Bad sixth years are often preceded by burdensome fifth years. It is impossible to predict whether the curse arrived several months earlier than expected, or whether Hurricane Katrina was simply foreshadowing the challenges that will persist for Bush. Rebuilding the afflicted region will require a considerable portion of the president's attention, and if he is distracted by other political crises or problems which commonly arise in the sixth year, the likelihood of failing in the Gulf will increase.

Nonetheless, there is a silver lining for the president and his party. It is improbable that the small number of competitive House races will enable the Democrats to win

the required fifteen seats to take control of the chamber. In the Senate, the Democrats will find themselves on the short end in 2006, defending more seats than the Republicans. As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate, difficult sixth years precipitate national shifts in midterm voting behavior. Due to the small gains that can be made in 2006, the bad news for the Democrats is that even if a national backlash ignites, it may not produce enough seat changes to switch political control in either the House or the Senate. As history shows us, Bush should tread cautiously in 2006. But even if his sixth year is cursed, the Republicans may end up no worse for the wear.

References

- Abramowitz, Alan. 1999. Explaining success and failure in the 1998 midterm elections: Comparing the influence of swing voters and core party supporters. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 31(1): 60-61.
- . 2005. Don't blame redistricting for uncompetitive elections. *Crystal Ball*, May 26. Available from <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/article.php?id=AIA2005052601>.
- Abramowitz, Alan, Albert Cover, and Helmut Norpoth. 1986. The president's party in midterm elections: Going from bad to worse. *American Journal of Political Science* 30(3): 562-76.
- Ambrose, Stephen E. 1984. *Eisenhower: The president*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Balz, Dan. 2005. A bid to repair a presidency. *Washington Post*, September 16, p. A1.
- Brownlee, W. Elliott, and C. Eugene Steurle. 2003. Taxation. In *The Reagan presidency: Pragmatic conservatism and its legacies*, edited by W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Burns, James MacGregor. 1956. *Roosevelt: The lion and the fox*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Campbell, James E. 1991. The presidential surge and its midterm decline in congressional elections, 1868-1988. *Journal of Politics* 53(2): 477-87.
- Clinton, Bill. 2004. *My life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Conlan, Timothy J., Margaret T. Wrightson, and David R. Beam. 1990. *Taxing choices: The politics of tax reform*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Daniel, Douglass. 2005. Sen. Hagel says Iraq looking like Vietnam. *Washington Post Online*, August 22. Available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.
- Davis, Kenneth S. 1993. *FDR: Into the storm 1937-1940*. New York: Random House.
- Doherty, Carroll J. 1998. Congress compiles a modest record in a session sidetracked by scandal. *CQ Weekly Report*, November 14, pp. 3079-80.
- Ferrell, Robert H., ed. 1981. *The Eisenhower diaries*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.
- Greenstein, Fred I. 1994. *The hidden-band presidency: Eisenhower as leader*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Harris, John F. 2005. *The survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House*. New York: Random House.
- Hook, Janet. 1986. Hard-fought battles mark key votes in 1986. *CQ Weekly Report*, November 1, p. 2755.
- Livermore, Seward W. 1966. *Woodrow Wilson and the war Congress, 1916-1918*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Milkis, Sidney M., and Michael Nelson. 2003. *The American presidency: Origins and development, 1776-2002*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Ornstein, Norm. 2005. The GOP won big on legislation, the Rafael Palmeiro way. *Roll Call Online*, August 8. Available from <http://www.rollcall.com>.
- Ornstein, Norm, Thomas Mann, and Michael Malbin. 2000. *Vital statistics on Congress, 1999-2000*. Washington, DC: AEI Press.
- Pach, Chester J., and Elmo Richardson. 1991. *The presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

- Reagan, Ronald. 1990. *An American life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rothenberg, Stu. 2005. Midterms spell trouble, but 'itch' theory is a real head-scratcher. *Roll Call*, September 12.
- Sapiro, Virginia, and David T. Canon. 2000. Race, gender, and the Clinton presidency. In *The Clinton legacy*, edited by Colin Campbell and Bert A. Rockman. New York: Chatham House Publishers.
- Sinclair, Barbara. 2000. The president as legislative leader. In *The Clinton legacy*, edited by Colin Campbell and Bert A. Rockman. New York: Chatham House Publishers.
- Smith, Jean Edward. 2001. *Grant*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Speakes, Larry. 1988. *Speaking out*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Stid, Daniel. 1998. *The president as statesman*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Weisman, Jonathan, and Jim VandeHei. 2005. Road bill reflects the power of pork. *Washington Post*, August 11, p. A1.