

The Impact of National Tides and District-Level Effects on Electoral Outcomes: The U.S. Congressional Elections of 1862–63

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We examine the U.S. Congressional elections of 1862–63, which resulted in a stunning setback for President Abraham Lincoln and the incumbent Republican Party. After the electoral “dust” had cleared, the Republicans lost control of the House, as their share of seats declined from 59 percent to just over 46 percent. While historians contend that the national electorate’s general unhappiness with the war effort produced a largely systematic backlash against all Republican candidates, we explore the impact of *both* national tides and district-level effects on electoral outcomes. Specifically, we hypothesize that the emergence of quality challenges, district-specific war casualties, and the timing of the midterm elections in conjunction with changing national conditions influenced individual electoral fortunes. Our empirical analysis confirms each of these expectations. More generally, our results provide support for modern theories of electoral outcomes in a previously unexplored historical context and suggest several potential avenues for further research.

While the economic, social, and military aspects of the American Civil War have been the focus of intensive research by historians and social scientists, the political aspects have not received the same careful attention. In particular, aside from some studies of the U.S. Presidential Election of 1864,¹ little is known about general electoral politics during the war, both North and South. This article takes a small step toward filling that void by examining one particularly important political event, the U.S. Congressional elections of 1862–63, which would dramatically shape the political conduct of the war effort in the United States until the conclusion of hostilities.²

The midterm House elections were a disaster for President Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans, as the party lost twenty-three seats and saw its majority status disappear: while the Republicans made up 59 percent of the 37th House, they would only comprise 46.2 percent of the 38th House

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¹For recent treatments of the U.S. Presidential Election of 1864, see Long (1996) and Waugh (1997).

²Prior to 1880, congressional elections were not uniformly held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Instead, each state could determine when its particular set of elections would take place. As a result, the midterm elections during the Civil War were held as early as June 1862 (Oregon), and as late as November 1863 (Maryland). For a breakdown of election dates for each state, see Appendix A.

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(Martis 1989). As a result, in order to maintain a working majority, the Republicans were forced to construct a “coalition government” for the remainder of the war, reaching out to the sixteen members of the pro-war, pro-emancipation Unconditional Union Party in the border states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and West Virginia (Martis 1989, 36). In keeping with the coalition format, the Republicans (and their coalition partners) began referring to themselves as the “Union Party,” and ultimately, the 1864 Republican convention was changed to the “National Union Convention” (*CQ Guide to U.S. Elections*, 52).³

Despite the impact of the 1862–63 congressional elections on national political events, no systematic studies of the causes of the Republican defeats have been undertaken. The entire literature on the 1862–63 elections is descriptive in nature, suggesting that several factors, principally Lincoln’s suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*, his release of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Union army’s series of defeats and stalemates in key battles, produced a general backlash against the entire field of Republican candidates (Harbison 1930; Nevins 1959, 318–322; Voegeli 1967, 62–63; Trefousse 1969, 259–261; Long 1997). As a result, this informal “national decline hypothesis” has been taken as fact, with no examination of the elections at the *district* level. We seek to provide a more systematic understanding of the 1862–63 elections by developing and testing a model that includes *both* national and district-specific effects.

Additionally, the 1862–63 congressional elections provide an excellent opportunity to use out-of-sample data to test contemporary theories of electoral politics in a historical context. The 1862–63 elections, like the congressional elections of 1932, 1964, and 1994, produced a substantial turnover in membership. Contemporary theories of elections attribute twentieth century electoral shifts to both national and district-specific effects (e.g., the presence of quality challengers). This begs the question: do these contemporary theories have application outside the modern era, or are they time-bound? We believe that an examination of 1862–63 election data is a step toward providing an answer.

Our findings confirm a number of theoretical expectations and shed new light on an important era of American political development. We show that the effect of quality challengers on electoral outcomes is not confined to postwar, candidate-centered elections in the twentieth century. We also find that battle casualties af-

fected the electoral fortunes of individual members, a result that is unique to this analysis. Moreover, we discover that variation in polling dates produced a differential impact on incumbent vote totals. Overall, our results indicate that both national and district-specific conditions contributed to nineteenth century election outcomes.

The article is organized as follows. We first present a brief discussion of the events leading up to and including the 1862 elections and review historical explanations for the electoral outcomes. We then turn our attention to several alternative hypotheses and underlying theoretical issues. Next, we propose and test an empirical model examining the effects of both national and district-level factors on incumbent vote share. We also present additional results to complement and support our prior findings. We conclude our analysis by discussing the implications of our results and explore possible avenues for further research.

Pre-Election Background and the “National Decline Hypothesis”

The first eighteen months of the Civil War were quite disappointing militarily for the United States. Defeats or costly victories at First Bull Run in July 1861, Shiloh in April 1862, Seven Days in June/July 1862, Second Bull Run in August 1862, and Antietam in September 1862 proved disheartening for both the Lincoln Administration and the nation.⁴ As the first set of important midterm elections approached in October/November 1862, President Lincoln was determined to make some radical moves to turn the tide of the war.

From the outset of hostilities, Lincoln had been steadfast that the basis of the war was *not* to end slavery, but rather to preserve the Union. His determination, however, was seriously challenged by a series of domestic crises: the aforementioned military losses, a failed cabinet coup, challenges to his authority by Congressional Radicals, and dwindling support within the nation brought on by the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* and the passage of conscription laws. Moreover, by late summer 1862, Lincoln was also bedeviled by a foreign crisis, as European recognition of the Confederate government (led by Great Britain) was looking more and more like a reality (Catton 1980, 105–106).

In response to these crises, Lincoln undertook a calculated “about face” on war policy. In September, after

³Martis notes that the Union Party label “began to be used even before the 1862 congressional elections and by 1864 was in general use” (1989, 36).

⁴For a listing of major Civil War battles from 1861 to 1863 and their outcomes, see Appendix B.

Antietam, he presented his “Proclamation of Emancipation,” which would free all slaves in Confederate-controlled areas, to take effect on January 1, 1863. For Lincoln, the proclamation had several strategic goals. First, it would reduce the power of the radical element within the Republican Party, as well as rivals in his own cabinet, by coopting their primary issue (Voegeli 1967, 53). Second, it would appeal to members of the working class in Great Britain, who were opposed to slavery, and in doing so, force Parliament to delay recognition of the Confederacy (Donald 1995, 414–416). Third, it would force the South to accept his prior policy of gradual, compensated emancipation or prepare for “war to the finish.”⁵

Despite Lincoln’s best efforts, political turmoil and growing military losses would spell disaster for congressional Republicans in the midterm elections of 1862. Although the Republicans “broke even” initially in the early elections in Oregon and Maine, they were not as fortunate in the October/November elections in the Midwest. The Democrats captured a majority of seats in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, and made modest gains in Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (Martis 1989; Dubin 1998). The Republicans fared better in the midterm elections of 1863—coinciding with the turnaround in the Union war effort—but the fallout from the previous year could not be overcome: when the 38th House convened, the Republicans no longer controlled a majority of seats. Indeed, the Republicans were only able to exercise majority control in the 38th House by joining with Unconditional Unionists in the border states under the banner of the “Union Party.”⁶

Historical accounts of the 1862–63 congressional elections provide several explanations as to why the Republicans lost seats in the House, all of which fall under the general rubric of a “national decline hypothesis.” Harbison (1930) and Tap (1998), for instance, argue that the election results can best be understood as a “vote of want of confidence” in President Lincoln and the Republican Party establishment. They contend that the public was dissatisfied with the prosecution of the war and suggest that the Republican turnover in the Midwest can be viewed as a clear repudiation of Lincoln’s administration and Republican Party rule.⁷ Although Nevins (1959)

agrees that the negative effects of the war may have contributed to the heavy Republican losses in the Midwest, he asserts that the increasing frequency of arbitrary arrests and violations of civil liberties during 1862 played a more prominent role in the electoral defeats. Voegeli (1967), on the other hand, attributes a considerable amount of blame for Republican losses to Lincoln and his attention to the race issue as evidenced by his desire to proceed with the Emancipation Proclamation. While Voegeli concedes that other factors besides slavery inspired the revolt against the Republicans in 1862, he states clearly that “the emancipation issue with its many ramifications played a leading role in the substantial Democratic gains” (62).

Theoretical Issues

Despite their individual differences, all of the historical accounts share one similarity: they are entirely *macro-level* in nature. That is, they contend that “national forces” swept the Republican Party from its majority status in the House in some unspecified and undifferentiated manner. As such, none of these studies considers whether *micro-level* variance, or district level-effects, played any part in *individual* House races.

In this analysis, we focus on individual congressional races in an attempt to offer a more comprehensive and systematic explanation for the 1862–63 election outcomes. Our focus on individual races allows us to account for the effects of national tides as well as explore the impact of district-level effects.⁸

Moreover, we explore the election outcomes in the context of contemporary theories of electoral politics. Testing modern theories historically can help us address significant puzzles or irregularities that have previously gone unexplained, and, in the process, further refine those theories. We combine aspects of Jacobson and Kernell’s (1981) theory of strategic challengers and Jacobson’s

⁵Earlier in the war, Lincoln’s plan was to compensate slaveholders for their “property.” Once accomplished, the freed slaves would then be colonized overseas in some undisclosed location (Nevins 1959, 6–10).

⁶For more information on the partisan distribution in the 37th and 38th Congresses, see Appendix C.

⁷Pratt (1931) and Tap (1993) make similar arguments with respect to the congressional races in Illinois.

⁸While we agree with Rusk (1970), Kernell (1977), Katz and Sala (1996), and others who suggest that electoral accountability was enhanced greatly by the adoption of the Australian ballot in the 1890s, we also believe that an “electoral connection” and a “personal vote” existed in the nineteenth-century Congress. For example, Bianco, Spence, and Wilkerson (1996) find evidence of an electoral connection as early as 1816. And even later, during the party-ballot era, voters still possessed methods to punish or reward incumbents for their performance. As Keyssar notes, “a voter could write his own ballot, or ‘scratch’ names from a party ballot” (2000, 142). Moreover, Silbey (1977, Chapter 6) finds that most states held their gubernatorial elections separately from their congressional elections in 1862–63, suggesting that congressional candidates were important and visible candidates on the ballot in the years that they ran.

(2001) distinction regarding quality challengers to account for both national and district effects in explaining the 1862–63 election outcomes. In brief, Jacobson and Kernell maintain that national conditions influence the number of quality challengers who run (and their distribution across parties), while Jacobson emphasizes that congressional election outcomes are strongly influenced by the presence of quality challengers.

The congressional elections of 1862–63 provide an *ideal* case to conduct a quasi-experimental test of the Jacobson-Kernell hypothesis regarding strategic challengers. Because most of the elections to the 38th Congress were staggered over a period of approximately fifteen months, the effects of changing national conditions can be examined within a *single* electoral cycle. As students of elections in parliamentary systems are well aware, the timing of elections may significantly affect outcomes (Lupia and Strøm 1995).

With the deterioration of the war effort prior to the 1862 elections, combined with the unpopularity of emancipation and the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*, we contend that more qualified challengers should have emerged to face marginal Republican incumbents. When national conditions improved in 1863, however, we contend that quality candidates should have been in smaller supply, and therefore Republican incumbents should have fared better.

Given the state of military affairs in 1862, incumbent Republicans had another reason to be concerned about the impending elections. That is, while most of the major battles were fought on *Southern* soil, the growing number of *Northern* casualties did not go unnoticed by the American public. Daily stories in both *The Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Times* reported the escalating casualties with ever increasing frequency; at times, lists of the dead and wounded accounted for nearly half of the pages in a given issue. With this significant amount of media attention, one might expect to observe a noticeable (and potentially negative) response from the electorate. Indeed, Mueller (1973, 1994), Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening (1997), and Gartner and Segura (1998, 2000) have all found an inverse relationship between casualties and public opinion.

A question that has *not* been investigated to this point, however, is the effect of casualties on members' electoral fortunes. We explore this question at length for the 1862–63 elections, and do so at the district level, for several reasons. First, Gartner and Segura (2000) find that the *spatial proximity* of casualties significantly affects public opinion, because, they argue, an individual's closest personal attachments are those that are geographically immediate. Second, and perhaps more importantly, battle casualties during the Civil War were *not* uniformly

distributed across congressional districts. Some districts sponsored more troops and some regiments were involved in bloodier battles, both of which helped produce differentials in district-level casualty figures. We therefore expect citizens from high-casualty districts to have possessed a less favorable opinion of the war (and their incumbent representative) than citizens from low-casualty districts. Taking this argument to the logical next step, we should observe a negative relationship between district-level casualties and incumbent vote share.

In addition to specific, district-level consequences, “national tides” may have played a role in electoral outcomes. That is, the public may have punished elected officials for the overall conduct of the war, along the lines suggested by historians. This argument is akin to Tufte (1978) and Fiorina's (1981) notion of retrospective voting, in which leaders are held accountable for the economic state of the nation. In times of national economic prosperity, voters reward the party in power by returning its members to office, while in times of national economic hardship, the president's party is often punished.⁹ More generally, Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995) find that political leaders are also held electorally accountable for more endogenous national conditions, namely the decision to enter into costly wars.

If “national tides” existed in the elections of 1862–63, they should have taken two forms. First, such tides should have been unfavorable to the Republican field of candidates as a whole in 1862, when national conditions were especially grim. By 1863, however, the war effort had improved considerably, so the effects of the previous year's tides on Republicans should have been muted (or shifted in a positive direction).

Model and Results

Our primary focus in this analysis will be to investigate the electoral performance of incumbent candidates in the 1862–63 House elections.¹⁰ We begin by specifying the following OLS regression model:

⁹Our argument is consistent with contemporary theories linking presidential politics to midterm elections. Not only is the magnitude of the midterm seat change affected by the surge in the presidential election, but the popularity of the president also influences midterm elections. A cursory examination of elections throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveals a consistent pattern of losses by the president's party at the midterm from 1826 to present, except in 1866, 1934, and 1998. We wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to include a discussion of this trend in the article.

¹⁰We explore open-seat elections later.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Incumbent Vote Share} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Previous Vote Share} + \\ & \beta_2 \text{Challenger Quality} + \beta_3 \text{District Casualties} + \\ & \beta_4 \text{Casualties} * 1862 + \beta_5 \text{Seniority} + \\ & \beta_6 \text{District Redrawn} + \beta_7 \text{Republican (1862)} + \\ & \beta_8 \text{Republican (1863)} + \beta_9 \text{Unconditional Unionist} + \\ & \beta_{10} \text{Unionist} \end{aligned}$$

The dependent variable is the incumbent's share of the two-party vote.¹¹ To capture the simultaneous effect of relevant explanatory variables, we control for a variety of factors we expect to influence vote share. One important factor is past performance—the incumbent's share of the two-party vote in the previous election. This allows us to control for the incumbent's enduring popularity along with the underlying partisan composition of the district.

We also hypothesize that the presence of a quality challenger will affect the percentage of the two-party vote an incumbent receives. While most scholars agree that challenger quality plays an important role in influencing contemporary election outcomes,¹² we can speak with less certainty about its impact on elections prior to World War II. This is due largely to the difficulty in obtaining data on challengers' political backgrounds (and, therefore, coding challenger quality) before the mid-1940s. While we faced some general problems regarding data availability, they proved not to be insurmountable. That is, after a detailed search, we were able to uncover prior political experience data for 92 percent of challengers who ran in the 1862–63 elections. A principal source of challenger-quality information was obtained from the *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774 to Present*.¹³ We supplemented this information with data from *Who Was Who in American History, Science and Technology* (1976), a publication including notable Americans from 1763 to 1900, "The Political Graveyard," a web site with information on over 53,000 politicians,¹⁴ and newspaper stories from both the *Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Times*.¹⁵

¹¹We coded vote share as both the actual percentage of the vote received by the candidates and the percentage of the two-party vote received by the Republican and Democratic candidates (where members of the Union Party are treated as Republicans). We utilize the two-party vote variable in our analysis.

¹²This is not to say that scholars necessarily agree on how to accurately measure challenger quality. We adopt the simple dichotomy of previous electoral experience utilized by Jacobson (1989, 2001). For a general discussion of alternative measures of challenger quality, see Bond, Fleisher, and Talbert (1997).

¹³The online version of the directory can be accessed at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>.

¹⁴The Political Graveyard web site can be accessed at <http://www.politicalgraveyard.com>.

¹⁵In his analysis of strategic politicians, Jacobson (1989) assumes that individuals for whom he could not find political experience

We have also coded partisan affiliation for all candidates, based on labels reported in Martis (1989) and Dubin (1998). In addition to Republicans and Democrats, two other political parties controlled seats in Congress during this period—the Unionists and the Unconditional Unionists—and we include a dummy variable for each.¹⁶ Moreover, we separated Republicans into two groups: those who ran in 1862 versus 1863. We contend that these two Republican dummies will capture the effects of "national tides" in the electoral process. If Republican incumbents were indeed punished indiscriminately by the public when the war was going poorly, this "backlash effect" should show up in the 1862 dummy. By 1863, after national conditions had improved, we expect any backlash effects to wash out.

An additional explanatory variable is the number of district-level casualties, which we expect to influence incumbent vote share contingent on the current state of the war. As Gartner and Segura (1998, 286) argue, when a war is not going well, casualties will have a negative effect on public opinion; whereas, if the tide of the conflict improves, the effects of casualties will be muted. In this vein, we also include an interaction term that combines the effect of casualties with elections held in 1862. Given the grim state of the war effort in 1862, we expect casualties to have negatively affected incumbent vote share during elections held that year.

To test the validity of this hypothesis, we collected Union casualty data from Fox's *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War* (1889). Since Fox reports casualties by regiment, we used county/district data provided in Parsons, Beach, and Dubin's *United States Congressional Districts and Data* (1986) to map regimental recruiting areas to specific districts.¹⁷ From this mapping, we were able to create district-level casualty figures.¹⁸

data (after consulting a variety of sources) should not be considered quality challengers. We make a similar assumption in this analysis.

¹⁶Members of the Unionist Party had a moderate stance on abolition and did not usually cooperate with Northern Republicans. Unconditional Unionists, on the other hand, desired the immediate abolition of slavery across the Southern states and typically supported Lincoln's prosecution of the war (Martis 1989, 38).

¹⁷To be clear, we are arguing that district-level casualties are measured in terms of the number of regimental losses from specific congressional districts. Thus, the loss of forty-five soldiers from Illinois' 22nd regiment is coded as part of the total casualties for the 12th congressional district, since this district encompassed that regiment.

¹⁸We were able to match seventy-one congressional districts with regimental casualties drawn from those political boundaries. For the remaining state casualties (i.e., for those regiments that we could not match to a particular district), we distributed them equally across all districts within the state.

We also control for the seniority level of incumbents seeking reelection. We expect incumbent seniority to influence vote share, but the direction of the effect is not obvious. While new members may be more vulnerable electorally, a backlash against incumbents who have served in Congress for several terms is also possible. This latter result would be consistent with the phenomenon of “incumbency fatigue,” where constituents become less supportive of representatives the longer they remain in office (Lin and Guillen 1999). Finally, *District Redrawn* defines whether or not a congressional district was reapportioned, to control for potential redistricting effects from the 1860 Census.

The results of our model appear in Table 1. The hypotheses regarding the impact of both national and district-level effects are supported by our findings. In particular, we observe that the coefficient on challenger quality is both significant and negative: incumbents who faced a quality challenger suffered almost a 10 percent decrease in vote share on average. Challenger quality also exerts the largest impact on vote share when compared with the other explanatory variables in the model. This result also suggests that marginal incumbents were less likely to win when running against a quality challenger.

Also noteworthy are the differential effects of being a Republican incumbent in 1862 versus 1863. Republican incumbents who ran in 1862 received 5.5 percent less of the two-party vote for simply being Republican. Thus, the public’s negative reaction to national conditions in 1862, and the subsequent backlash against the party in power, was sufficient by itself to defeat marginal Republican incumbents.¹⁹ By 1863, however, national conditions (principally, the state of the war) had improved substantially, and there was no general backlash against Republicans.²⁰

With regard to the impact of district-level casualties on incumbent vote share, the net effect in 1862 is deter-

¹⁹As an alternative to the “timing” hypothesis, we also tested whether Republican losses in 1862 were due to regional effects. Looking at the calendar of election dates (see Appendix A), we observe that the 1862 elections occurred predominantly in the Midwest, while many of the 1863 elections occurred in the Northeast. Thus, we ran the same model as before, except that we included only one Republican dummy and created two additional regional dummies to proxy for Midwest and Northeast (with the Border states serving as the regional baseline). Neither regional variable was significant.

²⁰Engstrom and Kernell (2000) find that subsequent-year elections in a single electoral cycle were less responsive to national forces across the nineteenth century. They attribute these phenomena to increased mobilization on the part of the losing party in the subsequent election.

TABLE 1 Regression Analysis of the 1862–63 Congressional Vote Margin for Incumbents

	Coefficients	Robust Standard Errors
Previous Vote Margin (1860)	0.388***	0.114
Challenger Quality	-9.802***	2.225
District-Level Casualties	0.204*	0.103
Casualties Interaction (1862)	-0.210*	0.103
Seniority	-1.430*	0.606
District Redrawn	1.222	2.334
Republicans (1862)	-5.538**	2.053
Republicans (1863)	-28.442	16.590
Unconditional Unionist	4.967	9.112
Unionist	-6.845	5.889
Constant	41.581***	6.380
R ²	0.482	
F	6.99***	
N	93	

***Significant at $p < .001$ **Significant at $p < 0.01$

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

RESET: 0.8918 (probability of rejecting the null of no omitted variables)

mined by summing the coefficients on the district-level casualties variable and the casualties/1862 interaction term.²¹ As hypothesized, district-level casualties are negatively related to incumbent vote share in the 1862 elections. However, the effect is small. For every 100 casualties in a district, an incumbent lost only 0.6 percent of the two-party vote.²²

While previous vote share in the 1860 elections is also significant, it had only a moderate impact on incumbent vote share in the 1862–63 elections. Moreover, we find some evidence of “incumbency fatigue,” as the relationship between seniority and vote share is both negative and significant. That is, with each additional term in office, the percentage of the total vote decreases by 1.4 percent. Lastly, we observe that the variables for reapportionment, as well as Unionist and Unconditional Unionist affiliation, were not significant.

²¹The coefficient on district-level casualties is 0.2042, while the interaction term is -0.2102, producing a net effect of -0.006.

²²We do not include a variable for fall 1862 elections in our regression model due to potential problems with multicollinearity, which rob the casualty variables of their explanatory power. An F-test on all the district-level casualty and 1862 variables indicates that as a group, they are not equal to 0.

Additional Analysis

In this section, we build upon our results in the previous section, as well as extend our analysis beyond the study of incumbents.

Examining the Strategic Nature of Quality Challengers

To this point, we have found that quality challengers had a considerable impact on incumbent vote share in the 1862-63 congressional elections. This, by itself, is a significant finding, but we wish to probe further. For example, did quality challengers also behave strategically in the manner discussed by Jacobson and Kernell (1981)? That is, were quality challengers strategic with regard to (a) whom they chose to run against and (b) when they chose to run? The answer is “yes” in both cases.

Looking first at the raw data, we find that a greater proportion of quality challengers emerged to run against “marginal” incumbents. Of the fifty-nine incumbents who won with less than 60 percent of the two-party vote in 1860, thirty-four (58 percent) faced a quality challenger. However, of the thirty-four incumbents who won with more than 60 percent of the vote, only eleven (32 percent) ran against an experienced opponent.

Examining the data more closely, we uncover a more informative result. Using a simple logit regression, with quality-challenger emergence as the dependent variable and many of the same independent variables as in our previous model, we find that quality challengers in 1862 targeted Republican incumbents *specifically* (as indicated by a Republican dummy variable), especially those who were increasingly electorally vulnerable (as indicated by interacting the Republican dummy with previous vote share). In 1863, however, electorally vulnerable incumbents were targeted (as indicated by previous vote share) *without reference to political party*.²³ Thus, while incumbent marginality was an important determinant of quality-challenger emergence in both 1862 and 1863, declining national conditions in 1862 singled out Republican incumbents generally, and marginal Republican incumbents especially, as prime targets.

Moreover, a greater proportion of quality Democratic challengers emerged in 1862 relative to 1863, indicating the importance of national conditions on

²³In both 1862 and 1863, district-level casualties were negatively related to the appearance of quality challengers, but in each case they were not statistically significant at conventional levels ($p < .128$ and $p < .183$, respectively).

the decision to run. In 1862, when national conditions were bleak, 34 percent of Republican incumbents faced a quality challenger, while in 1863, after the tide of the war had turned, only 25 percent of Republican incumbents faced a quality challenger. These results are especially noteworthy, as they illustrate that the proportion of quality challengers declined within a *single* electoral cycle.

Exploring the Impact of Electoral Timing: A Counterfactual

As noted previously, the timing of the 1862-63 elections was important to individual Republican fortunes. Republican incumbents who ran during the “dark days” of 1862 were punished indiscriminately by voters (in addition to “hits” they took because of district-level effects), while Republican incumbents who ran amid the improved conditions of 1863 received no penalty. These results are interesting, largely because they offer insights into the impact of changing national conditions (in this case, the state of the war) on electoral fortunes. Elections in the modern era are not subject to this same differential impact, since all are held on the same day during an election year.

To further illustrate the differential impact of electoral timing, we employ a simple counterfactual. Based on our results in Table 1, we calculated whether Republican outcomes would have differed, had all elections been held in *either* late 1862 *or* 1863, all else equal. As reported in Table 2, we find that if all elections were held in 1862, the Republicans would have lost eight additional seats. Conversely, if all elections were held in 1863, the Republicans would have picked up twenty-one additional seats and retained majority control of the House (and, therefore, would not have needed to form a coalition with the Unconditional Unionists). Thus, timing played a crucial role in Republican midterm losses, as a larger proportion of elections were held in 1862, when national conditions were less favorable for the party as a whole.²⁴

²⁴These findings also have implications for elections in the modern era. If the 1992 elections had been held shortly after the Gulf War, for instance, George Bush likely would have been reelected to a second term. These findings are also interesting in light of electoral practices in countries with parliamentary systems (e.g., Britain). Since leaders in parliamentary systems have some ability to determine when national elections are held, they also have the opportunity to wait until favorable national conditions occur to maximize their chances of retaining power.

TABLE 2 Counterfactuals for the Congressional Elections of 1862–63

	# of Republican Seats	# of Non-Republican Seats
Actual Outcome	85	99
If All Races Were Held in 1862	77	107
If All Races Were Held in 1863	106	78

Examining Beyond Incumbency

While our focus has been on incumbents to this point, we also investigate Republican candidates' electoral fortunes more generally. In particular, we examine the degree to which Republican candidates were likely to *win* in the 1862–63 elections. To this end, we ran a basic logit model, in which the dependent variable measures whether or not a Republican candidate was victorious in 1862–63. We incorporate many of the same independent variables from our incumbent model, while adding measures for partisan seat control in the previous House, open seat races, and election year.

The results of our logit model appear in Table 3 and complement our previous findings. First, Republicans who faced a quality challenger were less likely to win election to the 38th Congress, all else equal. In particular, as illustrated by the change in the predicted probability, a Republican's chance of winning decreased by 13.6 percent when running against a quality challenger. Thus, we find that the presence of a quality challenger was quite systematic, affecting not only vote share, but also the likelihood of winning.

We also find that both the open seat variable and the variable measuring partisan control in the previous House are significant. Overall, our results indicate that Republicans were 22 percent more likely to win an open seat and 43 percent more likely to retain control of a Republican seat.²⁵ Finally, we notice that the variables for district-level casualties are not significant in this model. This finding is not surprising, however, given the small substantive effect on vote share discovered earlier (see Table 1). Therefore, we should not expect casualties to tilt the outcome of the election in favor of one candidate over the other.

²⁵ Of the ninety-one open seats in the 1862–63 elections, Republicans won fifty-two compared to thirty-nine for the Democrats.

Conclusion

In addition to shedding light on an important political event in the course of the Civil War, our results suggest that contemporary theories of elections can be extended back in time to illuminate historical puzzles that have not received widespread or systematic attention. In particular, we have shown that the effect of quality challengers on electoral outcomes is not confined to postwar elections in the twentieth century. In the 1862–63 elections, incumbents who ran against quality challengers received a significantly smaller share of the two-party vote. *Indeed, these same individuals were more likely to lose when forced to run against a quality challenger.* These results are especially interesting as they serve to confirm the importance of district-specific effects on electoral outcomes in the nineteenth century and suggest that quality challengers exhibited strategic behavior in running against marginal incumbents.

We also find that battle casualties affected the electoral fortunes of individual members, a result that is unique to this analysis. As the number of district-specific casualties prior to the elections of 1862 increased, incumbents received a smaller percentage of the two-party vote. Had the number of casualties been appreciably greater, we likely would have observed them influencing election outcomes as well, instead of just having an effect at the margins. Nonetheless, these findings are striking because they identify a previously unexplored factor that can influence constituents' electoral choices.

We also show that variation in polling dates produced a differential impact on incumbent vote totals. Because contemporary elections are held on the same Tuesday in November, national conditions affect all candidates equally. In the elections of 1862–63, however, national conditions were able to play an independent role, because individual state elections were spread out over fifteen months. As a result, we were able to examine how changes in the state of the war affected electoral performance. We find that Republican incumbents who ran in 1862 did significantly worse electorally than Republicans incumbents who ran in 1863, all else equal. Since the Union war effort was especially bleak in late 1862, voters appear to have responded by voting against Lincoln and the party in power—namely, the Republicans. Thanks to these results, we have a better understanding of how the timing of elections can independently affect electoral outcomes.

The encouraging nature of our findings gives rise to a number of interesting questions for future analyses. First, to what degree do our quality-challenger findings

TABLE 3 Logit Analysis of Republican Winners in the 1862-63 Elections

	Coefficients	Robust Standard Errors	Change in Pred. Probability ^a
Challenger Quality	-0.783*	0.419	-13.6%
District-Level Casualties	0.009	0.009	11.4%
Casualties Interaction (1862)	-0.001	0.010	
Seniority	0.138	0.213	3.7%
District Redrawn	-0.549	0.464	-11.3%
Open Seat	1.007*	0.516	22.1%
Republican Seat (37th House)	2.085**	0.450	42.9%
Fall 1862 Elections	-0.515	0.608	-10.8%
Constant	-1.354*	0.783	
Pseudo R ²	0.2399		
Wald χ^2	36.75**		
N	164		

One-Tailed Tests: ** Significant at $p < 0.01$ * Significant at $p < 0.05$

Log Likelihood = -86.368

Percent Correctly Classified = 73.78

Reduction of Error = 46.25

^aThe change in predicted probability is calculated from a baseline model using Tomz, Wittenberg, and King's (1999) CLARIFY program where interval-level variables are held at their mean and dichotomous variables are held at 0. For interval-level variables, changes reflect an increase of one standard deviation. For dichotomous variables, the values reported reflect changes from one category to the other. For more information about the CLARIFY program, see King, Tomz, and Wittenberg (2000).

correspond to other nineteenth-century elections (or early twentieth-century elections)? Second, did the timing of elections have a significant impact on other nineteenth-century elections? Finally, to what degree might we expect casualties in other conflicts (e.g., World War II or the Vietnam War) to affect representatives'

electoral fortunes? Systematic exploration of these questions should offer new insights that enrich our understanding of electoral outcomes and political behavior.

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Appendix A Congressional Election Date, 1862–63

Date Congressional Elections Held	State
June 2, 1862	Oregon
September 8, 1862	Maine
October 14, 1862	Indiana
	Iowa
	Ohio
	Pennsylvania
November 1, 1862	Delaware
November 4, 1862	Illinois
	Kansas
	Massachusetts
	Michigan
	Minnesota
	Missouri
	New Jersey
	New York
	Wisconsin
March 10, 1863	New Hampshire
April 1, 1863	Rhode Island
April 6, 1863	Connecticut
August 3, 1863	Kentucky
September 1, 1863	Vermont
September 2, 1863	California
October 22, 1863	West Virginia
November 3, 1863	Maryland

Source: Dubin, Michael J. (1998) *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*

Appendix B Civil War Losses by Date for the North and South**

Date	Battle	Northern Losses	Winner
7-21-61	1st Bull Run	3334	South
8-10-61	Wilson's Creek	1235	South
2-15-62	Fort Donelson	2832	North
3-6-62	Pea Ridge	1384	North
4-6-62	Shiloh	13047	North
5-5-62	Williamsburg	2239	North
5-23-62	Front Royal	2019	South
5-31-62	Fair Oaks	5031	<i>Indeterminate</i>
6-9-62	Port Republic	1018	South
6-25-62	Seven Days	6837	South
8-28-62	Manassas	14462	South
8-30-62	Richmond	5353	South
9-12-62	Harper's Ferry	12737*	<i>Indeterminate</i>
9-14-62	South Mountain	1813	North
9-14-62	Munfordville	4148*	<i>Indeterminate</i>
9-17-62	Antietam	12410	North
10-3-62	Corinth	2520	North
10-8-62	Chaplin Hills	4211	North
11-31-62	Stone's River	13249	North
5-1-63	Chancellorsville	17287	South
7-1-63	Gettysburg	23001	North
9-19-63	Chickamauga	16179	South

*At Harper's Ferry and Munfordville over 98 percent of the North's losses were captured or missing soldiers. Only 217 soldiers were killed or wounded at Harper's Ferry and seventy-two soldiers were killed or wounded at Munfordville.

**Information on major battles and who "won" or "lost" can be found in Fox (1889, 541–544)

Appendix C

Partisan Control of Seats in the 37th and 38th Congresses

State	37th House	38th House
California	3 Rep	3 Rep
Connecticut	2 Rep, 2 Dem	2 Rep, 2 Dem
Delaware	1 Un	1 Dem
Illinois	4 Rep, 5 Dem	5 Rep, 9 Dem
Indiana	7 Rep, 4 Dem	4 Rep, 7 Dem
Iowa	2 Rep	6 Rep
Kansas	1 Rep	1 Rep
Kentucky	1 Dem, 9 Un	3 Un, 6 Unc Un
Louisiana	2 Un	***
Maine	6 Rep	4 Rep, 1 Dem
Maryland	6 Un	1 Dem, 4 Unc Un
Massachusetts	10 Rep, 1 Con Un	10 Rep
Michigan	4 Rep	5 Rep, 1 Dem
Missouri	1 Rep, 5 Dem, 1 Con Un	2 Un, 6 Unc Un
Nevada	***	1 Rep
New Hampshire	3 Rep	2 Rep, 1 Dem
New Jersey	2 Rep, 3 Dem	1 Rep, 4 Dem
New York	23 Rep, 9 Dem, 1 Ind Dem	14 Rep, 17 Dem
Ohio	13 Rep, 8 Dem	5 Rep, 14 Dem
Oregon	1 Dem	1 Rep
Pennsylvania	19 Rep, 6 Dem	10 Rep, 12 Dem, 2 Ind Rep
Rhode Island	2 Un	2 Rep
Tennessee	3 Un	***
Vermont	3 Rep	3 Rep
Virginia	5 Un	***
West Virginia	***	3 Unc Un
Wisconsin	3 Rep	3 Rep, 3 Dem

Source: Martis, Kenneth. (1989) *The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress, 1789–1989*.

Appendix Key: Rep = Republican, Dem = Democrat, Un = Unionist, Unc Un = Unconditional Unionist, Con Un = Constitutional Unionist

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