The Macro Polity Updated

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Our 2002 book *The Macro Polity* presented several statistical analysis of US politics at the macro level of national US politics. As such, it was based on various time series of American politics over the 44 years from 1952 through 1996. Twelve years have passed since the last data point to serve as fodder to our book. We can update (at least some) of our time series, increasing our body of evidence by more than 25 percent. More importantly, since our book presents or findings as a series of causal laws about politics, we can ask how it holds up when extended to the post-1996 world of politics. Simply put, can it help us account for and understand politics, 1996-2008? From today's perspective in early 2008 with an uncertain election campaign still ahead of us, could *the Macro Polity* help us predict the future?

In this brief paper we present a partial update of the *Macro Polity* time series along with commentary.

Macropartisanship.

The Macro Polity, traces the shifts of macro-level party identification over the years. According to our argument, macropartisanship is an integrated series, slowly moving as a random walk. But the "random" shocks to partisanship are not all unexplained exogenous shocks. The long-term trend is systematic. Macropartisanship is the accumulation of the same political and economic shocks that affect presidential approval.

From *The Macro Polity* we have ready predictions (or postdictions) about the movement of macropartisanship post-1996. Our expectation is that during the second Clinton term, which was reasonably popular, Democratic partisanship would increase or at least stay the same. During the second Bush's administration our expectation would be a Republican shock to macropartisanship following 9/11 but a gradual move in the Democratic direction thereafter. This is what happened. Figure 1 presents the evidence showing both actual macropartisanship and the values predicted by cumulated political and economic shocks.

The top panels shows the 1990s when Clinton's economic successes restored Democratic fortunes while his tragic personal actions seem to have eventually negated those gains. (It is possible that the 2000 GOP surge reflects in part the transitory movement toward a successful presidential campaign.)

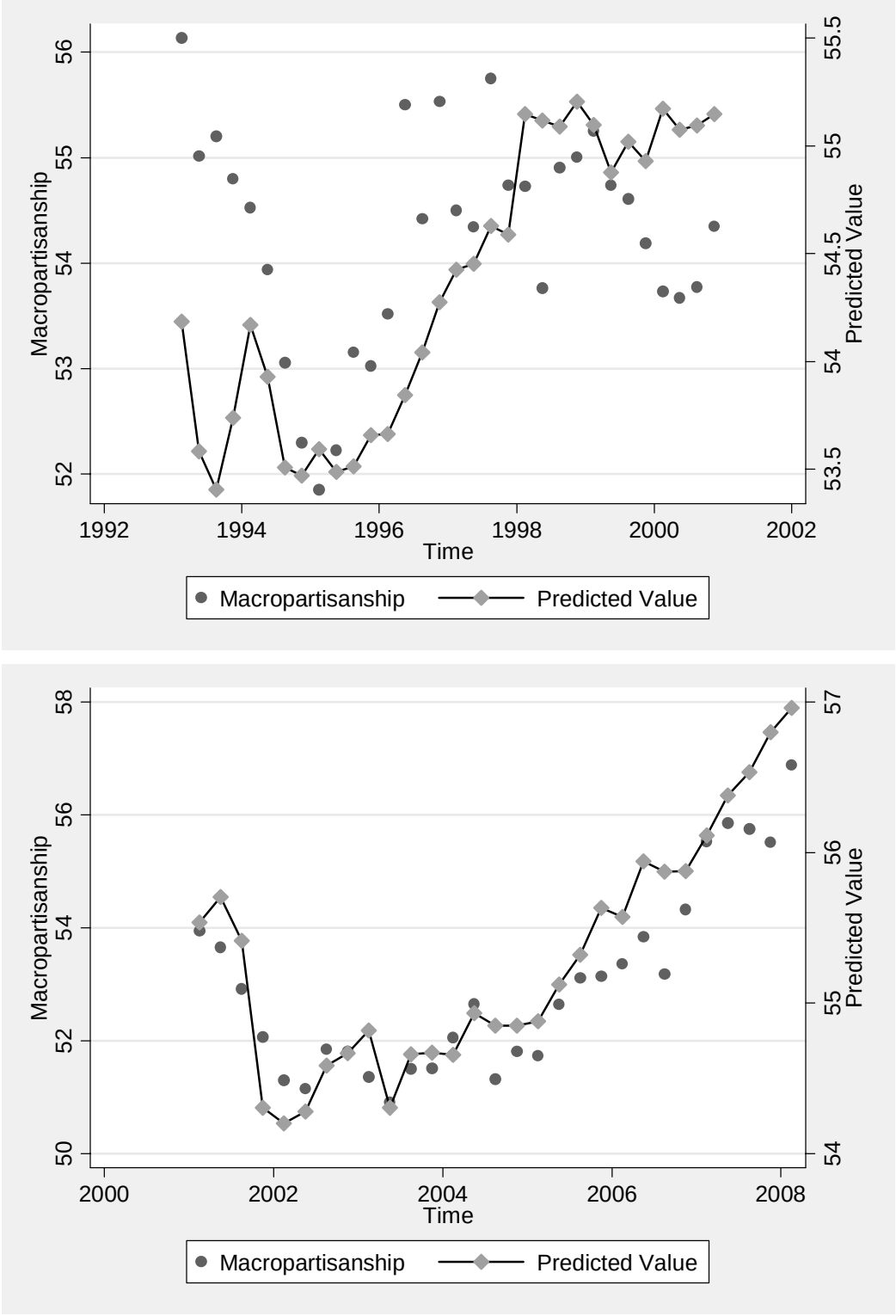

Figure 1. Macropartisanship Realized and Values Predicted from Cumulated Political and Economic Shocks (Clinton 1993-2000 above, and Bush 2001-2008 below)

In the second graph in the figure, one can see the Bush success associated with his management of the national crisis and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The Republicans gain loyalties—moving macropartisanship to almost parity by 2002. One can equally see the residue of the administration's eventual failures in Iraq and New Orleans. The slow leaking away of economic prosperity played a less visible part. By early 2008, macropartisanship had returned to its level of Democratic strength before the Reagan Revolution. With percentage values in the upper 50s, the partisan division looks something like that of the "normal vote" of the 1950s. This pattern does not approach the peaks of the Democrats' Great Society strength nor the temporary dividend associated with Watergate. But there is every sign that the politics of nationalism, continuing warfare, natural disasters, and slow economic decline have had their effect in the contemporary era.

Mood

"Mood" is the shorthand term for the liberal vs. conservative trend of American public opinion as measured over multiple policies and multiple polls (Stimson, 1991. 1999) *The Macro Polity* shows that Mood responds to policy in the sense that liberal national policies cause Mood to become more conservative (as demand for liberal policy corrections lessen) while conservative policies cause Mood to shift liberal (as demand for conservative policy corrections lessen).

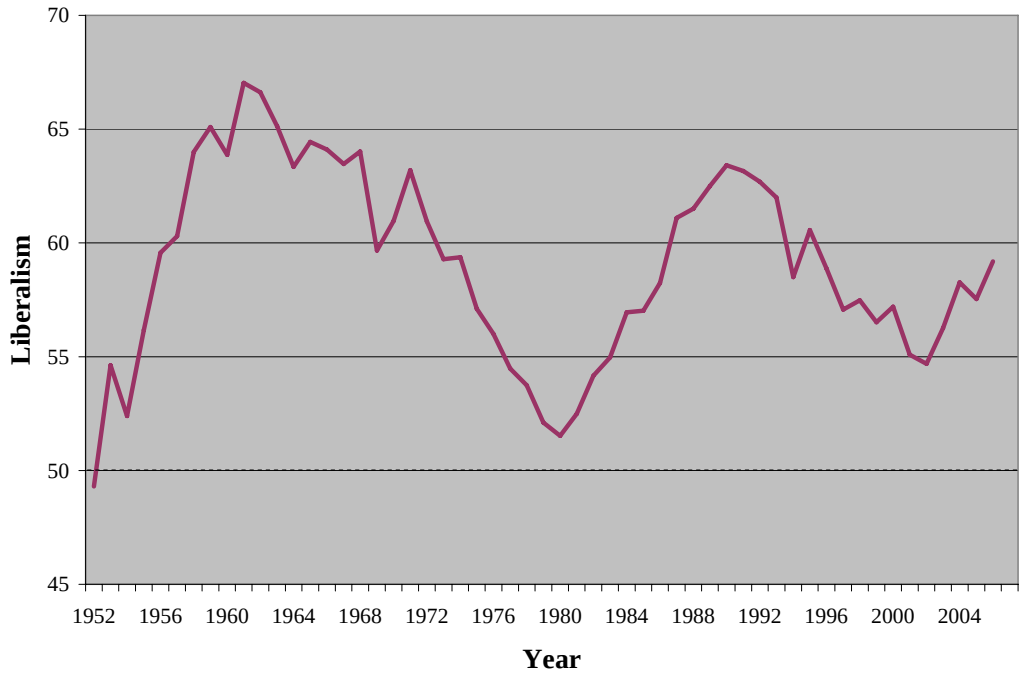

Figure 2. Mood Annual Series (1952-2006)

During divided government in Clinton's second term and (especially) in the two GW Bush terms, mostly with a Republican Congress, policy has been decidedly

conservative (see below). As a response, Mood has turned in a decidedly liberal direction. In 2006 this movement had been sustained but had not yet reached the level associated with the demands that produced the Great Society and, less markedly, the Reagan backlash. See Figure 2.

The figure displays annual Mood, 1952-2006. Mood has turned liberal in the 21st Century. But this turn is also interrupted by a spike in conservatism (downward spike in liberalism) in 2002. We see this as the short-term exogenous shock of 9/11. In effect, the terrorist attacks gave the Bush administration not only a boost in presidential approval and Republican identification. It also pushed the electorate in a more conservative direction. The greater approval, Republicanism, plus conservatism, we speculate, provided the Bush administration with the latitude to pursue their policy goals with minimal threats to electoral security. The conservative 9/11 shock allowed Bush to pursue conservative policies (including the Iraq gamble) with minimal short-term electoral risk.

Laws/Policy

According to *The Macro Polity*, Mood is a source of liberal versus conservative policy and a response to the past accumulation of policy. *The Macro Polity* measures biennial "Laws" as the net liberalism or conservatism of major laws as defined by Mayhew (1991, 2004). The accumulation is "policy." We add to the Laws series, drawing once again on Mayhew's master list of important legislation updated from Mayhew 2004 and David Mayhew's website. See Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows the decidedly conservative turn to laws post-1996. Although Laws (and Policy, its accumulation) respond to the demands of public opinion (Mood) a decisive force is the partisan composition of Congress. With a Republican tilt to Congress and (after 2000) the Bush presidency, we see the conservativism in law-making similar to that under the Republican government of the early Eisenhower years.

Also shown in Figure 3, overlaid with the time series of laws, is biennial Mood, measured separately for each Congress. We see that while Laws track Moods for much of the period, Laws drifts more conservative post-1996 than the earlier covariation would suggest. The reason of course is the Republican tilt of government control during this period. As we will see, Republican control of Congress—and then the presidency—put a break on policy liberalism, even as this resistance continued to cause a pent-up demand in the form of a more liberal Mood.

Table 1 shows our replication of the statistical analysis whereby Mood (lagged one biennium) influences Laws. With the five new observations, the combined influence, direct and indirect (via party control), of opinion on Laws declined slightly, with a considerable deflation of the R squared. The reason is clearly the

persistence of Republican control. The net equation including both Mood and party control yields a 1953-2006 equation similar to that from *The Macropolity*.

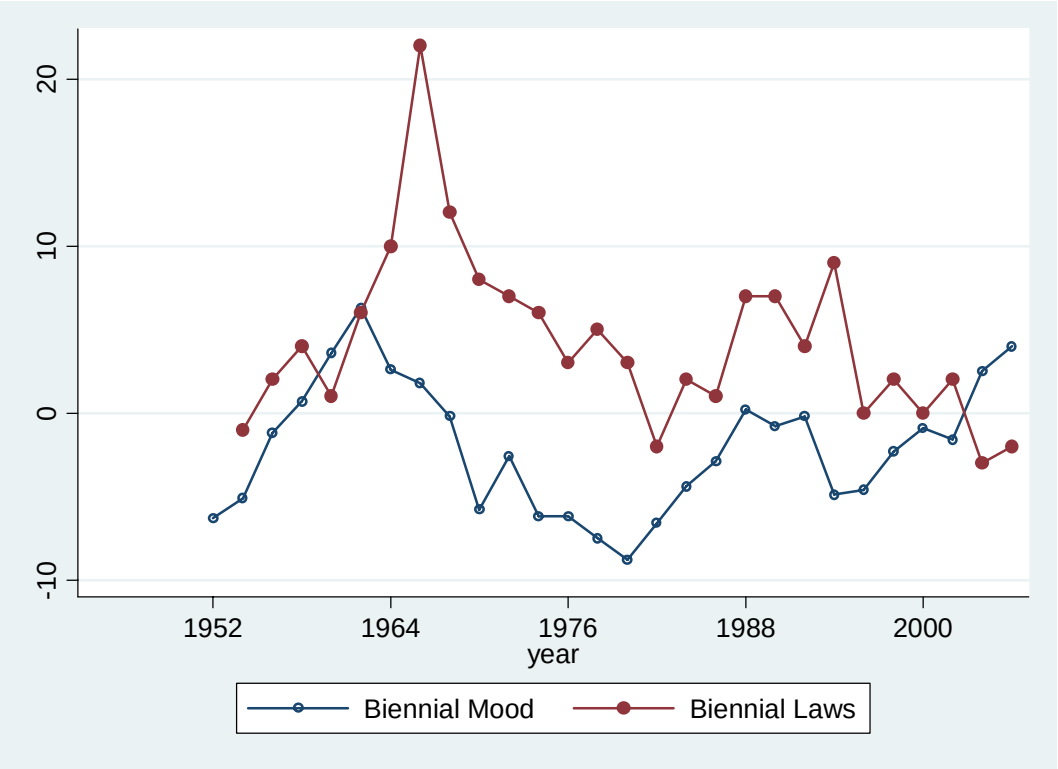

Figure 3. Laws and Mood, 1953-54—2004-06. Left scale is net number of important liberal Laws. Mood is represented as Mood minus 60 points.

Table 1. Predicting Biennial Laws from Biennial Mood and Party Control						
	1953-1954 to 1995-1996				’53-’54 to 2005-06	
	Original		Replication			
Mood Liberal-ism, *t*-1	0.77 (3.95)***	0.47 (2.10)*	0.85 (3.87)***	0.51 (2.19)*	0.67 (2.79)**	0.38 (2.16)*
Democratic Control		2.72 (2.32)*		2.81 (2.51)*		3.56 (5.10)***
Constant	-41.89 (-3.50)**	-28.62 (-2.34)*	-43.28 (-3.44)**	-30.04 (2.43)*	-34.65 (-2.48)*	-24.44 (-2.43)*
Adjusted *R* squared	,410	.516	.400	.525	.208	.604
RMSE	4.00	3.62	4.04	3.59	4.66	3.30
N	(22)	(22)	(22)	(22)	(27)	(27)
Note: Replication based on biennial Mood updated through 2006. Democratic Control=1 point for each institution controlled by Democrats: Senate, House, President (range=0-3). The “original” equations are adopted from *The Macro Polity*., Chapter 9. T-values are in parentheses. *=significant at .01; **=.01; ***=.001.						

With the updated data we also can continue to see the impact of Laws on Mood. The simplest test is to show that current Laws enforces Mood change is by predicting Laws from the before-after change in Mood from the previous biennium to the next biennium.. Figure 4 shows the pattern. With four observations added, the slope stays constant (from 0.51 to 0.52), while the t-statistic shifts larger in absolute magnitude from -3.96 to -4.87.

Clearly we see that just as the level of Mood liberalism affects the pace of liberal legislation, overshooting or undershooting public demand in turn affects Mood. When new policy fails to keep pace with the demands of Mood, as has been the case in recent years, the effect has been to make Mood more liberal. The liberal turn in Mood then affects election prospects. While this was insufficient to elect Kerry in 2004, a liberal Mood helped to elect a Democratic Congress in 2006 and provides good Democratic prospects for 2008. We turn next to the vote for President.

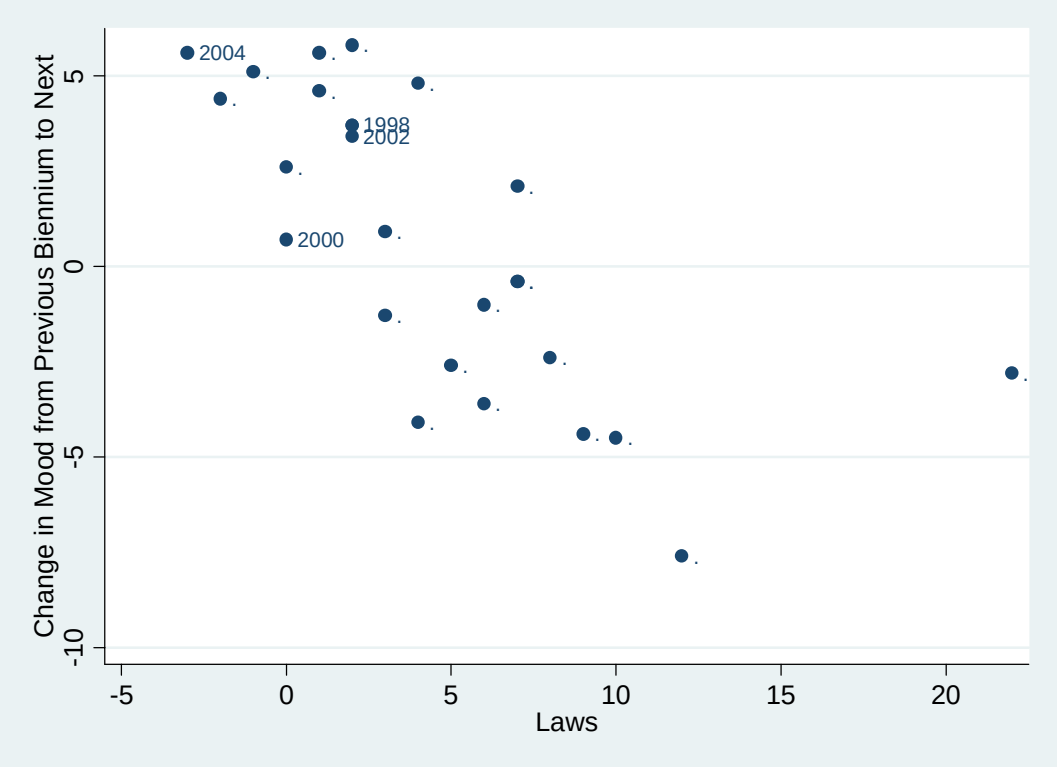

Figure 4. Mood Change as a Function of Laws, 1953-54—2004-6.

Elections

In *The Macro Polity*, we modeled the vote for President as a function of Macropartisanship (in October), Mood (for the election year), and a borrowed (from Ian Budge and Michael D. McDonald) measure of the parties' mean ideological position in the platform. Splicing Mood and platform position yields an indirect measure of relative proximity between the candidates and voters. *The Macro Polity* dealt with the problem of calibrating platforms and Mood on a common scale in two ways. One was to presume perceived party positions are a function of current and lagged platforms, with effects decaying with time. The other was to assume perceived party positions were represented by the current platform alone. Using this latter method, we present the old and new results in Table 2.

Our original equation accounts for over 90 percent of the variance in the presidential vote, with a residual error approximating that from predicting the vote from election eve polls. The key point is that all three independent variables—Macropartisanship, Mood, and Platform Liberalism—are highly significant predictors. The equation is a macro-level analogue to the standard micro-level equation where vote decisions are modeled as a function of party identification and some measure of ideological or policy proximity. Note that we can convert plat-

form scores and Mood into a measure of proximity by subtracting one from the other after weighting by their regression coefficients.

Table 2. Predicting the Democratic Presidential Vote from Macropartisanship, Mood, and Platform Liberalism, 1952-2004

	1952-2004		1952-2004
	Original	Replication	
% Dem., October Macropartisanship	1.41 (10.14)***	1.33 (10.35)***	1.33 (8.46)***
Mood Liberalism	0.90 (6.96)***	0.97 (7.37)***	0.82 (5.58)***
Platform Liberalism	-0.32 (-5.13)***	-0.35 (-6.86)***	-0.30 (-5.24)***
Intercept	-90.00 (-6.68)***	-89.39 (-7.03)***	-81.08 (-5.32)***
Adjusted R squared	.917	.924	.865
N	(12)	(12)	(14)

Note: Replication based on annual Mood updated through 2006. The "original" equation is adopted from *The Macro Polity*., Chapter 7. T-values are in parentheses. *=significant at .01; **=.01; ***=.001.

The elections of 2000 and 2004 allow for a pair of out of sample forecast based on our replication of The *Macro Polity*'s 1952-1996 analysis. The results are shown in Figure 5. Here, we see that Gore underperformed his prediction in 2000 by about 2.5 percentage points, a permissibly slim margin. Kerry underperformed, however, by 6 percentage points.

Of course out-of-sample forecasts are different than in-sample forecasts. It is not necessarily the case that the 21st century elections stand out for their unpredictability. Figure 6 shows the relationship between prediction and actual where the prediction is based on all 14 elections. Here we see that Gore's 2000 vote is predicted to within about a point. Kerry's deviation from predicted is reduced to about 3 points. Still, Kerry's defeat stands out as the one clear instance where our model gets the winner wrong.

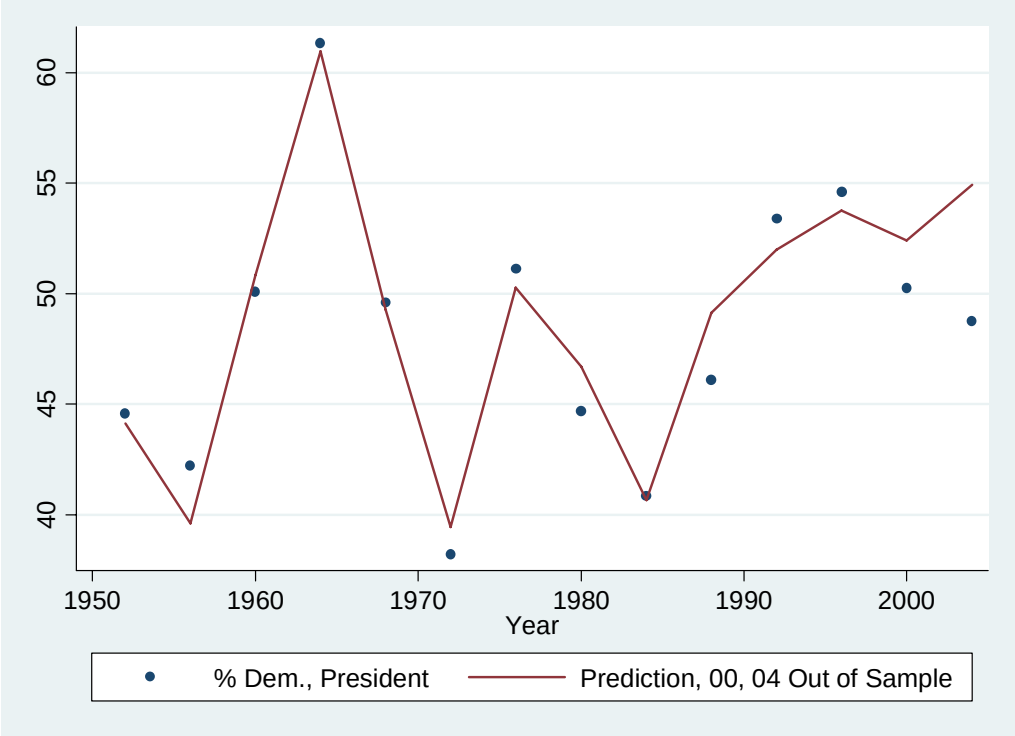

Figure 5. Democratic Vote for President, 1952-2004: Predicted and Actual (including out of sample 2000, 2004 observations).

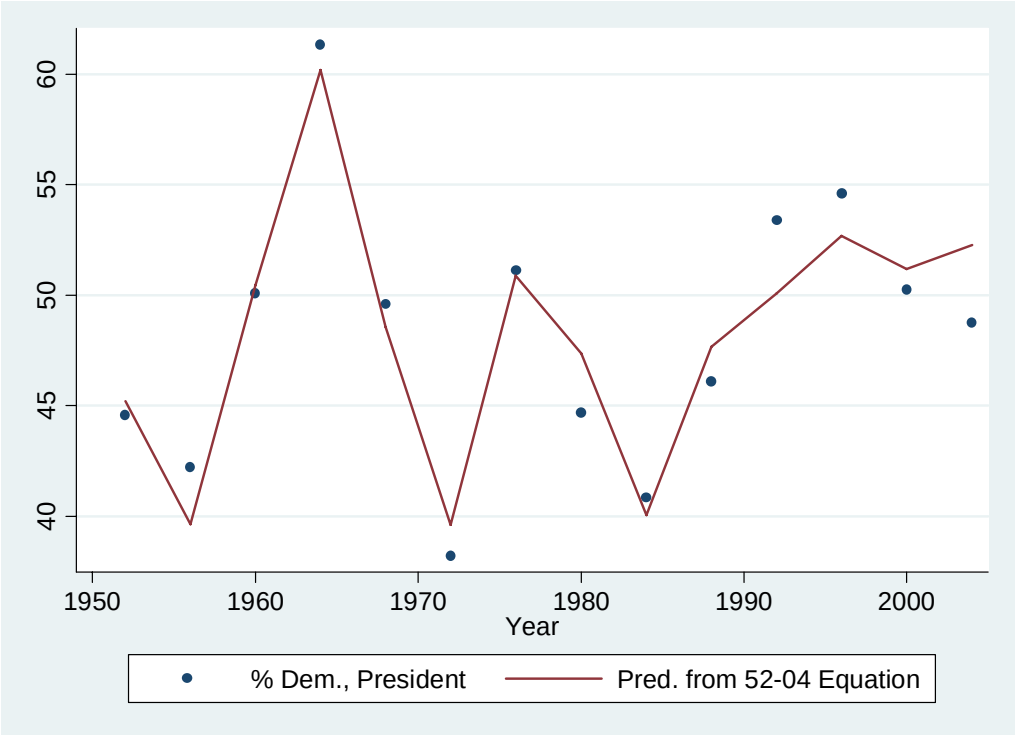

Figure 6 Democratic Vote for President, 1952-2004: Predicted and Actual, with prediction equation based on all 14 elections.

Putting the parts together

The Macro Polity has many moving parts. We have put them in motion over 1996-2008. What in particular can we say about the GW Bush presidency and *The Macro Polity*? First, as with most administrations (but with a 9/11 boost), the shift of party control of the presidency brought a surge in macropartisanship in the direction of the new president's party. This gain for the new administration is offset by the Mood loss generated by the new administration's policy pursuit. As the new administration gains in policy consumption (for Bush, more conservatism), it pays a price in terms of increased Mood liberalism. Eventually (although obviously not modeled in *The Macro Polity*) the Iraq war also imposed a price. The liberal turn in Mood put Bush at risk of a loss in 2004. This risk could have been avoided by limiting the conservative policy "gains." To see this, conduct the mental experiment of assuming that following the contested 2000 election and the good will of 9/11, Bush had acted as a moderate president and without the Iraq intervention. One can easily imagine that the outcome would have been a landslide reelection victory in 2004 instead of the close call. But in reality Bush gambled on achieving both policy change and reelection. And he succeeded.

The 2004-2008 story is different. Typical of the second term of an eight-year presidential cycle, Bush's popularity fell. And thus, so did Republican partisanship and Mood conservatism. As of 2008, the relevant time series show a rare convergence of Democratic macropartisanship and liberal Mood. These can be traced to the president's persistent unpopularity and conservative policies. According to our modeling the result should be a presidential victory for the Democrats and (as begun in 2006) Democratic control of the House and Senate.

But election outcomes are stochastic processes, so this prediction is no "lock." Of course a failure of the Democrats to achieve control in 2008 would lead to an even more confident prediction for 2012. With four more years of Republican policies, barring further exogenous pro-Republican shocks, 2012 would be the Democrats' year.

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