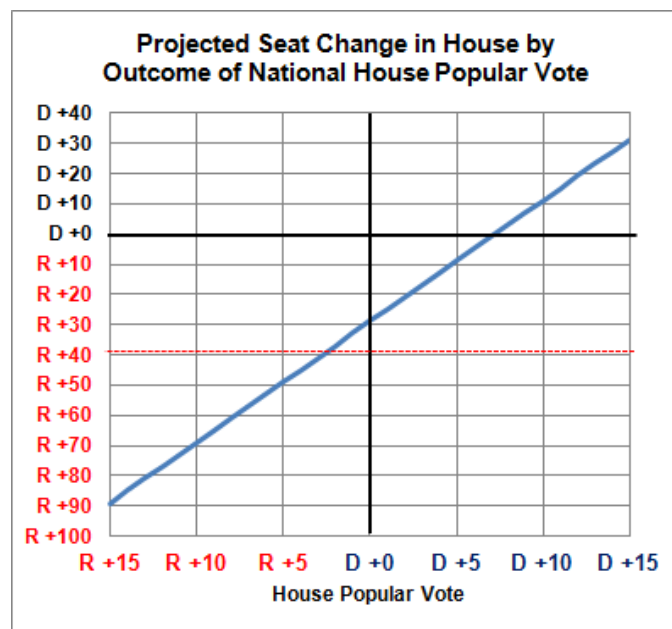


Polling News & Notes

Overlooked Recent Polling and Insights • August 19, 2010

Exploring the Relationship Between Generic Ballot Polls and House Seats: Two weeks ago, we [explored](#) how President Obama's job approval—now at an all-time low of 42% in the latest Gallup tracking—will affect Democrats' chances in the midterm elections. This week, Gallup released a new poll showing Republicans [ahead](#) 50% to 43% on the generic ballot among all voters—their best showing so far this election cycle. If Obama's job approval translates into the Democrats losing roughly 35 House seats, what does the GOP's seven-point generic ballot lead mean for their electoral fortunes?

Nate Silver, the left-leaning founder of the popular political blog FiveThirtyEight.com, has [developed a model](#) to predict the change in House seats based on the results of the popular vote in all House races since 1958 and the number of seats a party controlled at the end of the previous election.



In Silver's model, a tied popular vote favors Republicans and yields a loss of 30 seats for the Democrats. But the generic ballot and the popular vote are not the same thing: since 1992, the generic ballot has underestimated Republican support by an average of 3.4 percentage points. So a generic ballot where the Republicans lead by seven points (as Gallup shows they do today) would lead to a popular vote margin of ten points, and would therefore point to a loss of close to 70 seats—nearly twice as many as Republicans need to win back the House.

Many [political scientists](#) have also tried to measure the relationship between the House popular vote and change in seats, but the simplicity of Silver's model for predicting changes in House seats from generic ballot polling makes it a good benchmark. Even if today's seven-point GOP lead fades over the next three months, the model of the opinionated and talented amateur suggests any Republican advantage on the generic ballot will spell very bad news for Democrats come November.