

# The Electoral Effects of Closing Military Bases

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## **Abstract**

Can members of Congress escape blame for bad news in their districts? To maximize their chances of re-election, legislators seek to maintain their electoral connections with voters, defending key district interests. Could actions by successive presidential administrations over the past three decades to close obsolete military bases have undermined such efforts? Although Congress and the president have deployed Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commissions to facilitate such closures and insulate individual members of Congress from directly traceable costs of those decisions, the electoral implications of base closures have yet to be fully probed. Focusing on the House of Representatives, I examine all major BRAC closings, and find that major base closures do not affect the electoral fortunes of incumbents. Rather, voters predominantly and typically punish the president's party and first-term lawmakers during these elections. I conclude that Congressional fears about the electoral costs of base closings are likely unfounded.

**Keywords:** Pork barrel politics; Military base closures; Government policy; Elections

**Word Count:** 6,873

## Introduction

*The beauty of this proposal is that, if you have a military base in your district. . . under this proposal, I have 60 days. So, I come up here and I say “God have mercy. Don’t close this base in Texas. We can get attacked from the south. The Russians are going to go after our leadership and you know they are going to attack Texas. We need this base.” Then I can go out and lie down in the street and the bulldozers are coming and I have a trusty aide there just as it gets there to drag me out of the way. All the people in Muleshoe, or wherever this base is, will say, “You know, Phil Gramm got whipped, but it was like the Alamo. He was with us until the last second.” The bottom line is the public interest will have been preserved. - Statement by Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX), Senate Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Military Construction, Hearing on Base Closures, May 2, 1985.*

Can members of Congress escape blame for bad news in their district?<sup>1</sup> Conventional wisdom suggests that voters hold their representatives accountable for the objective performance of the economy (Kramer 1971; Fair 1978; Lenz 2013).<sup>2</sup> When there is a clear “clarity of responsibility” (Powell and Whitten 1993), voters are better equipped to hold their elected representatives accountable. Accordingly, legislators systematically attempt to avoid blame for potentially negative outcomes by obscuring causal links between lawmakers’ votes and policy outcomes (Weaver 1986; Arnold 1990). In contrast, the blind retrospection literature suggests that voters consistently punish incumbents for events outside of their control (e.g., Healy, Malhotra, and Mo 2010; Huber, Hill, and Lenz 2012; Miller 2013; Achen and Bartels 2017; Busby, Druckman, and Fredendall 2017).

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<sup>2</sup>Prior work by Kinder and Kiewiet (1981) and Kramer (1983) suggests that voters may react based on pocketbook or sociotropic considerations.

In this paper, I examine whether voters hold members of the U.S. House of Representatives accountable for single-shot events in their districts that are arguably beyond their control. Specifically, I study the electoral impact of military base closures on incumbent House members after five rounds of base closures conducted by Base Realignment and Closure commissions (BRAC) in 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, and 2005. Given incumbents' fear of imposing concentrated costs on their constituencies (Collie 1988), lawmakers conceived of BRAC to insulate members from blame for the closures. In contrast to earlier work (Rocca 2003) that focuses on a single election, my results across the full set of elections following BRAC commission decisions indicate that lawmakers largely succeeded in their task: I find little evidence that legislators suffered for BRAC-led closures, suggesting that electoral fears about the BRAC process may be unfounded (Pincus 2014; Sisk 2014; Clark 2017).<sup>3</sup>

## The Creation and Evolution of BRAC

Closing excess military bases began in earnest after World War II, with shutdowns accelerating after the Korean War ended in 1953. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara unilaterally closed over 60 bases between 1961 and 1968, decisions that were extremely unpopular among members of Congress and local government officials. They suspected that McNamara closed bases in retaliation against localities that did not vote for President Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 presidential election (Sorenson 2007). In 1965 Congress tried to restrict Secretary McNamara by passing legislation<sup>4</sup> that would have required the president to inform Congress whenever McNamara closed a military installation manned by more than 250 individuals. However, President Johnson vetoed the bill. President Ford vetoed a similar bill in 1976 (Military Construction Authorization Bill<sup>5</sup>), and in both cases Congress

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<sup>3</sup>President Obama requested authorization for BRAC rounds in 2011, 2012, and 2014, and President Trump requested authorization in 2017. Congress rejected all proposals.

<sup>4</sup>H.R. 8439 - Military Authorization Bill. Less significantly, H.R. 8439 also proposed that no base could be closed, abandoned, or significantly reduced in mission until 120 days after the reports of the proposed action are made to the Committees on Armed Services in both the House and Senate.

<sup>5</sup>H.R. 12384.

was unable to override the veto (Twight 1990). A 1977 bipartisan congressional effort under the O’Neill-Cohen Bill also proved ineffective.<sup>6</sup>

The impetus for a non-partisan base closure process originated with Representative Richard Arme y (R-TX), who sponsored base closure legislation multiple times in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Arme y was transparent in his goals, stating that the “trick to solving the politics of base closing is, first, to waive the environmental laws... [and] second, to ensure that no base will be closed for political reasons - the concern that inspired the red tape in the first place” (1988, 74). After a failed effort in 1987<sup>8</sup>, Arme y and Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci chartered base reduction legislation within the Defense Authorization Amendments and Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1988.<sup>9</sup> The bill nullified environmental concerns that inhibited previous base closing efforts and created a non-partisan process of closing military infrastructure. The original BRAC operated as follows. Congress and the president commenced a BRAC round by enacting legislation to authorize creation of a commission and set out the process for closing bases. The Department of Defense then submitted reviews to identify the necessary infrastructure to repel threats to national security, ranking bases across numerous criteria to identify obsolete bases for the BRAC commission.<sup>10</sup> The Pentagon also outlined the economic impacts of base closures and realignments using a cost-benefit model known as the Cost of Base Realignment Actions (COBRA) (Sorenson 2007). Those ranked higher on the list were more likely to be protected from closure; those toward the bottom

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<sup>6</sup>The O’Neill-Cohen Bill dislodged executive control over the base closure process, though it shifted base closures from a political dimension to competing environmental and political ones by applying the provisions of the National Environmental Protection Act to any base closure. It became exponentially more difficult to close a major base, with none closing until the first BRAC cycle in 1988.

<sup>7</sup>There were several independent, bipartisan commissions established prior to BRAC which were designed to ameliorate government inefficiencies. A prominent commission immediately preceding BRAC was the Grace Commission (and its corresponding Grace Commission Report) in 1984, which was designed to eliminate wasteful federal government spending. These commissions were inspired by older successful examples of independent commissions like the Federal Trade Commission in 1914. However, BRAC exceeded its predecessors with regards to its unchecked power. Many procedural checks applied to all delegations were excluded from BRAC including judicial review, stipulations from the Administrative Procedures Act, and routine congressional oversight.

<sup>8</sup>H.R. 1583 - Defense Savings Act.

<sup>9</sup>S. 2749.

<sup>10</sup>Example criteria include military value, mission suitability, availability of facilities, quality of facilities, quality of life, and quality of community support.

more likely to be shuttered.

After the ranking, the BRAC commission independently reviewed the list of potential closures and added or subtracted bases.<sup>11</sup> Once the commission created its recommendations for closure, the commission voted to adopt the list. If passed, the list was sent to the president for agreement or rejection in its entirety. If rejected, the BRAC Commission was required to reconsider their recommendations. If the president approved the list, Congress could either adopt a joint resolution of disapproval that would reject the entire BRAC list, or take no action. If the latter, the process for closing the designated bases began 45 days later. If Congress adopted a joint resolution of disapproval, the president could veto the resolution, subject then to an attempted congressional override. In short, Congress designed the BRAC process to streamline military base closures (Lockwood and Siehl 2004).

The 1988 cycle was frequently criticized by government officials for its opaque procedures for closing bases and was accused of working too closely with the Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, a Reagan appointee (Goren 2003). To address these concerns, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (DBCRA) prescribed a bipartisan appointee selection process. Most base closure hearings were open to the public, and specific military criteria had to be followed when assessing bases, rather than explicit political considerations. Although DBCRA did not remove all politicking. Many BRAC commissioners were former members of Congress who maintained relationships with party leaders. For example, observers found it peculiar that BRAC did not target any military installations in Georgia during any of the first four rounds, a period in which Senator Sam Dunn (D-GA) served as chair (and later ranking member) of the Armed Services Committee (Sorenson 1998).<sup>12</sup>

The DBCRA specified three additional BRAC rounds for 1991, 1993, and 1995, respectively. The first two cycles proceeded in a similar fashion to the original 1988 model,

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<sup>11</sup>For example, the 2005 BRAC Commission rejected, altered, and closed different installations than the Department of Defense recommendations. Sorenson (2007) found that the Commission agrees with 85 percent of the recommendations on average.

<sup>12</sup>The 2005 BRAC recommended three major Georgia installations for closure: Fort Gillem, Fort McPherson, and Naval Air Station Atlanta.

but in 1995 President Clinton ignored the all-or-nothing nature of the BRAC recommendations, removing two major bases from the closure list.<sup>13</sup> Defenders of BRAC accused Clinton of manipulating the system for political gain, as the maneuver saved 20,000 jobs in states considered critical in the 1996 presidential election (Mayer 2007). Congressional support for BRAC plummeted: Both chambers of Congress repeatedly rejected new BRAC authorization requests. When the 2005 round was eventually authorized, the House Armed Services Committee noted that the closure process had morphed into a process akin to pre-BRAC base closures and advocated for a BRAC process similar to the 1988 round (Congress 2005). Instead, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld used BRAC as a strategic reorganization tool, a move that was met with skepticism from both outside observers and military branches alike (Boot 2005). Rumsfeld hardened Congress' aversion towards BRAC-led base closures, and no subsequent BRACs have been authorized since 2005.

## Electoral Implications of BRAC

According to Mayhew (1974), legislators pay special attention to voters back home, seeking to preserve if not increase the flow of particularized benefits to their districts. Members of Congress seek to convey to constituents their competency as legislators and to avoid blame for unpopular decisions that affect their districts. Given the perceived economic importance of military bases by local constituencies, lawmakers typically defend bases from efforts to close or realign them. Military base closures directly undermine lawmakers' reputations as defenders of their districts, potentially signaling to constituents that their legislator is disinterested in their district or incapable of defending district interests.

Because the electorate views military installations as “semi-permanent” benefits for the district, constituents are aware of political happenings regarding the bases (Arnold 1979). In return, legislators struggle try to avoid imposing costs on concentrated groups for diffuse

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<sup>13</sup>McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento and Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio.

common goods (Collie 1988).<sup>14</sup> This is why lawmakers favored BRAC: the shuttering process allowed them to claim credit for efficient use of Pentagon resources if their district was not affected, and kept their fingerprints off any decision to close one in their district. Individual members of Congress pass off shuttering responsibility with the hopes of deflecting blame for the closures (Weaver 1986) by exhibiting a “veil of ignorance” (Congleton and Sweetser 1992) for how their respective base was chosen for closure.

According to Arnold (1990), for a given policy choice to be traceable to an elected representative, three conditions must hold: voters must notice the effect of a policy and attribute those results to a particular action to which their legislator contributed. Thus, delegating base closing authority to an independent commission *should* have the effect of circumventing constituency wrath, as the “link” between legislator and outcome would become obscured (Reynolds 2017). However, a direct connection may exist between legislators and bases closing in their constituency. Stein and Bickers (1994) extend Arnold’s (1990) logic to distributive benefits, arguing that a straightforward connection between distributive benefits and electoral outcomes requires three qualifications: 1) constituents are aware of the existence of distributive benefits; 2) the incumbent’s actions can be attached to the distributive benefits; and 3) constituents use this information in the voting booth to reward or punish incumbents. Thus, Stein and Bickers find that attentive constituents are the most likely to be aware of increases in distributive policy.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, voters might be made aware of the major base closure by oppositional candidates who highlight the adverse economic effects, especially during highly polarized elections (Kingdon 1989; Arnold 1993; Sidman 2019). Economic conditions matter more when the campaigns themselves make them salient

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<sup>14</sup>Arnold (1990) suggests that members of Congress prefer doing the opposite, providing their geographic constituencies with particularistic benefits while spreading costs to the population at-large.

<sup>15</sup>However, their analysis aggregates the *number* of new federal program outlays between the 99th and 100th Congress to individual congressional districts, not the economic impact associated with any individual award. This methodological approach distorts the salience of an individual installation, though, because military bases are created equal. Using the approach above, several minor base closures (e.g., 50 personnel each) would be more influential than a larger base (e.g., 5000 personnel) closing. Installations of varying size and strategic importance were chosen for closure and realignment across the five BRAC cycles. As a result, voter awareness will likely be higher when there are greater costs associated with closure.

to voters (Vavreck 2009), and the media exacerbates these perceptions (Hetherington 1996; Arnold 2013). This leads me to my first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Incumbent members of Congress who experience a major base closure in their district are likely to receive a lower percentage of the vote in the subsequent election relative to members of Congress whose districts were not affected by a base closing.*

Beyond economic considerations, voters may attribute the major base closure to the presidential administration. The president appoints the Secretary of Defense and requests authorization for BRAC. Thus, voters have cause to hold the president's party accountable for the closing. The clear attribution evokes a stronger response from voters (Duch and Stevenson 2008), especially with increasingly nationalized American political behavior (Hopkins 2018). If voters view in-party members of Congress (i.e., those of the same party as the president) as affiliates of the president, voters may penalize all in-party candidates (Tuftte 1975; Jacobson 2007). This leads to my second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: Members of Congress from the president's party are likely to suffer greater electoral losses when a major base closes in their district relative to out-party lawmakers.*

Additionally, as evidenced by Senator Nunn's defense of Georgia's military installations, prestige within Congress may deter commissions from targeting bases in the states or districts of more senior members. Congressional influence and electoral safety likely both grow with tenure in office. In contrast, for more junior members, a major base closure likely hinders the ability to cultivate support and a strong personal vote (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987). Without a reputation to defend themselves, first-term members of Congress may lack sufficient credibility to withstand a closure - leading to my third hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3: First-term incumbent members of Congress are more likely to suffer greater electoral losses when a major base closes in their district relative to more senior members of Congress.*



## Data and Methods

To explore the impact of major BRAC closures on House incumbent vote share, I examine House general election outcomes between 1974 and 2014. Specifically, I utilize a within-district fixed effects design to capture the average effect of major base closures on House electoral fortunes for four of the five BRAC rounds (1988, 1993, 1995, and 2005).<sup>16</sup> Appendix C.1 provides a full listing of the major installations closed, as well as the count of closures by district by year (since some congressional districts had multiple major closures in a single cycle). The 1991 BRAC cycle is omitted due to the confounding effects of redistricting. Given that redistricting non-randomly shifts some voters between different districts, this intervention prohibits a direct analysis of the effects of major base closures.<sup>17</sup> Also, whether it is a new party taking control of the state government or if the state itself gained or lost House of Representative seats from the reapportionment process, district lines are unlikely to remain fixed through a single redistricting cycle, let alone the multiple decades of this analysis. Post-reapportionment, voters from an unaffected district may be voting for a House incumbent who experienced a major base closure, and vice versa. As a result, I exclude any observation for which redistricting occurred in the previous 2 years (either through reapportionment or court order).<sup>18</sup> Additionally, I assume that detrimental impacts from the initial BRAC announcement are sufficient for electoral loss. Although bases were not immediately closed after the BRAC recommendation, their effects were likely immediate (Rocca 2003).<sup>19</sup>

Using a within-district modeling strategy circumvents temporal redistricting issues,

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<sup>16</sup>Appendix B.1 provides an analysis for those elections immediately affected by BRAC closures (1988-2006). Results are unchanged with the subsetted data set.

<sup>17</sup>Ideally, synthetic comparison districts would be identified for each treated district using control group information to map the counterfactual trend. However, redistricting precludes this option, as district voters do not remain static pre- and post-redistricting. This same issue inhibits a dynamic panel estimation strategy.

<sup>18</sup>Existing district boundaries for the House of Representatives remain until the January after the first election post-census. However, the new district lines are used for voting purposes.

<sup>19</sup>For example, major base closures from the 1988 BRAC cycle recommendation list closed between 1991 and 1995. That is, no major base fully closed in 1988.

as I can estimate fixed effects for each congressional district within each decade.<sup>20</sup> Given 435 congressional districts across five decades, there are over one thousand unique district parameters to model unit-specific variation.<sup>21</sup>

A key assumption underlying the fixed effects estimation process is that previous BRAC rounds did not affect more recent rounds. If the 1991 BRAC cycle affected members of Congress, they would unlikely be targeted again by the 1993 BRAC Commission. If this discounting exists, the results are likely to be biased. This is unlikely to be pernicious, however, since there are several cases across both political parties in which the same congressional district experienced major base closures in consecutive BRAC cycles (e.g., South Carolina’s first district in 1991 and 1993, California’s eighth district in 1988, 1991, and 1993). Moreover, prior literature has found no systematic evidence of political influence on base closings (Beaulier, Hall, and Lynch 2011).

Following previous literature on electoral margins (e.g., Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Carson et al. 2010), the dependent variable is the incumbent’s percentage of the two-party vote in a contested election.<sup>22</sup> The key independent variable is whether or not a congressional district experienced a major base closure in election  $t$ . Table 7 in Appendix C.1 shows the number of major bases closed in each BRAC cycle by state. I define major base closures following past precedent by cross-referencing sources from the U.S. Government

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<sup>20</sup>Appendix B.2 includes two-way fixed effects models that control for the year to account for time-varying heterogeneity. However, the year fixed effects are highly collinear with the presidential party variable and are thus omitted from the main text. Including the year fixed effect does not alter the main results.

<sup>21</sup>For example, Alaska’s first congressional district has unique decade-specific fixed effects for the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s.

<sup>22</sup>Contested elections are those where two candidates each receive at least 10 percent of the vote. Additionally, there may be increasing or decreasing marginal returns to BRAC cycles. Regarding increasing returns, each BRAC round became increasingly difficult to select bases for closure. Consider the aforementioned Fort Douglas which was closed as a part of the 1988 cycle. It was relatively simple to suggest that a base primarily devoted to protecting obsolete Pony Express routes could be closed. Given that the more egregious examples of waste were discontinued in earlier BRAC cycles, it may have become increasingly difficult (and thus increasingly damaging electorally) with each subsequent round of closures. Simultaneously, however, BRAC was becoming more politicized, as legislators were given increasing powers towards defending against BRAC closures. I anticipate that these forces will cancel out in the analysis, and do not need to be explicitly accounted for. Also, those bases closed by BRAC which were then relocated to another base within the district were not counted. So long as personnel remain within the district, it is unlikely that voters would punish their member of Congress.

Accountability Office (GAO) (Lepore 2013) and Sorenson (2007), classifying major bases as those which had an estimated closure cost of more than one hundred million dollars at the time of closure.<sup>23</sup>

There are four potential possibilities from a BRAC round: a base that is closed or loses or gains military personnel, or the creation of a new base. In addition to major closures, hundreds of military installations were also realigned every BRAC round. If a district were to experience a major base closure but receive additional personnel in other bases as a form of compensation, the negative effect from that individual base closure may be reduced. Unfortunately, existing data limitations prevent a systematic analysis of if a major base closure was neutralized by net positive realignments.

To control for the political nature of BRAC closures, I use a dummy variable that captures the partisan composition of government. Since the unit of analysis is the individual member of Congress, this dichotomous indicator is made with reference to the legislator. I create a dummy variable equal to 1 if the legislator is a member of the president's party, 0 otherwise. Additionally, scholars have found that first-term incumbents increase their vote margins during their initial reelection bid (e.g., Abramowitz 1991). To capture the effect of first-term status, I create a dummy variable equal to 1 if the member of Congress was serving their first term, 0 otherwise. Lastly, I control for an incumbent's ideology using first-dimension DW-NOMINATE scores (Poole and Rosenthal 1985, 2007), which assess legislator voting tendencies on the dominant Left-Right economic dimension. To test hypotheses 2 and 3, I interact the major base closure variable with in-party status and first-term status, respectively.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>There is agreement amongst scholars upon which bases are major, though the defined classification is not always as obvious. For the 2005 BRAC cycle, those bases which had an estimated closure cost of more than one hundred million dollars at the time of closure were considered major bases by the Department of Defense. However, as the GAO (2013) notes, "In prior BRAC rounds, closures and realignments were often difficult to tabulate precisely, and GAO relied on DOD's characterization of which bases were considered to be major in the absence of a consistent definition" (22). Empirically, the lack of a systematic list of bases up for closure prevents a regression discontinuity-like design whereby districts narrowly chosen for major base closure could be compared to those that narrowly avoided major base closure. Appendix A.1 explores if BRAC decisions were endogenous to political or economic factors in a district, finding no relationships.

<sup>24</sup>I exclude commonly used variables in legislative studies like the spending differential between candidates

I account for district economic conditions by utilizing district-level unemployment data provided by Foster-Molina’s (2017) data set from 1972-2014. The unemployment measure captures the percentage of the district’s population that is unemployed yet still in the labor force.<sup>25</sup> I also capture a district’s relative partisanship by measuring the share of the two-party vote that the presidential candidate of the incumbent’s party received in the congressional district in the most recent presidential election (Carson et al. 2010; Jacobson and Carson 2019). I also include a dummy variable equal to 1 for if the election were a midterm election, 0 if presidential.

## Results

The results of the fixed effects models are shown in Table 1. Overall, the models provide little evidence that lawmakers pay a price when BRAC recommended closure of major military bases in their districts. I start by showing the bivariate relationship between major base closures and incumbent vote share in model 1: Major base closures do not have a statistically significant effect on an incumbent’s electoral fortunes.<sup>26</sup> I then turn in models 2 and 3 to mitigate against potential confounding effects of omitted variables by adding controls to capture district-level economic and political conditions. Model 2 tests for the direct effects of the control variables; Model 3 adds interactive terms to test hypotheses 2 and 3. Figure 1 shows that major base closures do not affect incumbents’ electoral performance even after controlling for relevant factors - thus offering no support for hypothesis 1.

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and whether a quality challenger was running (Jacobson 1989) because they are post-treatment variables with respect to the timing of major base closure announcements. Closure were often made prior to or during the electoral cycle, generating negative attention for incumbent candidates. Due to the closure announcement, quality challengers may have been more likely to run. Similarly, oppositional candidates likely fundraised more given the perceived weakness of the incumbent legislator. These variables are thus partial consequences of the major base closure treatment, thus biasing the estimate of the treatment effect. Models including these variables are provided in Appendix B.3. The main results are unchanged with the incorporation of these variables.

<sup>25</sup>These unemployment statistics are taken from the decennial census. Thus, these district estimates are static in many periods, and not responsive to yearly shifts within each decade.

<sup>26</sup>A two-sample t-test provides similar results, demonstrating no electoral difference between candidates who do and do not experience a major base closure ( $t = -0.5787$ ).

(Table 1 about here.)

(Figure 1 about here.)

Several control variables in models 2 and 3 are negatively signed and statistically significant. In-party lawmakers lose roughly six percent of the two-party vote. This result, as well as the negative coefficient for the midterm election variable, is likely attributable to the 1994 elections which featured a massive referendum on President Clinton's first two years in office, ultimately leading to the first Republican majority of both chambers for the first time in 42 years (Ferejohn and Calvert 1984).<sup>27</sup> Additionally, I find that first-term legislators are punished by losing roughly three percent of the vote, contrasting with prior work indicating the existence of a sophomore surge (Jacobson 2015).

Consistent with prior research, I find that excessive ideological extremity results in electoral losses for House incumbents (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Carson and Williamson 2017; Highton 2018). Likewise, higher unemployment rates correspond to lower vote shares for incumbents, in line with the notion that voters reward incumbents during good economic times and punish them in bad times (e.g., Kiewiet 1983). The only positively signed control variable is the district partisanship variable, which is an expected outcome since presidential vote share at the district level serves as an informative proxy for evaluations of the incumbent candidate (Jacobson and Carson 2019).

There is no support, however, for hypotheses 2 and 3, as none of the interaction terms in model 3 reach statistical significance. Incumbents of the president's party do not fare appreciably worse than other incumbents, as shown in the coefficient estimate indistinguishable from 0. Similar findings emerge for the other interactive effects. Both interaction terms of major base closures and in-party status, and major base closures and first-term status are statistically indistinguishable from zero. Their large standard errors are likely due to the few major bases that closed across the four BRAC cycles used for estimation. There are 30 instances in which a member of the in-party experienced a major base closure, and only 13

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<sup>27</sup>Republicans gained 54 House seats overall.

cases in which a first-term member of Congress endured a major base closure. These small sample sizes may lead to unreliable estimates.

## Discussion and Conclusions

A long literature in the study of legislative politics argues that distributive benefits directly affect lawmakers' electoral outcomes (e.g., Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978; Arnold 1990; Rocca 2003; Finocchiaro and Jenkins 2016). Importantly, my null results suggest that BRAC might have protected House members from voter retribution. Despite incumbents often getting punished for circumstances beyond their purview (Huber, Hill, and Lenz 2012; Miller 2013; Achen and Bartels 2017), events like public hearings throughout the BRAC process may have allowed members of Congress to deflect blame for base closures and claim credit for trying to defeat the entire list of closures. Those steps in reaction to announced base closings appear to have allowed legislators to maintain their strong electoral connections to voters (Mayhew 1974). Of course it was rare for the Pentagon in the past to succeed in closing bases. So it is ultimately hard to know whether BRAC protected lawmakers from electoral fallout or whether the fear of voter backlash was misplaced in the first place.

That said, my findings align with current research suggesting that local economies are influential in determining voter behavior towards the president (Healy and Lenz 2017; de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2020). Although some research finds limited evidence of economic changes in the United States (e.g., Eisenberg and Ketcham 2004; Kriner and Reeves 2012), sampling and measurement error in these works may have provided artificially null results (Healy and Lenz 2017). Broadly speaking, the net economic effect of major base closures is negative, despite there being variation in a communities ability to recover post-BRAC (Touchton and Ashley 2019). Regional unemployment and housing prices both affect voter perceptions of the economy (Ansolabehere, Meredith, and Snowberg 2014), and major base closures influence both. Moreover, base closures are easily attributable to the

party in power, with accountability increasingly held on a national level (Hopkins 2018).

Muted effects of base closures for members of Congress may also be attributed to the changing electoral landscape. Surging political polarization during the 1990's and 2000's (Bartels 2000; Lewis-Beck 2008) may have distorted voter priorities, with partisan identification having a more substantive impact in later BRAC rounds (Sidman 2019). Were a new BRAC round authorized, the extent to which a major base closure becomes an issue in a congressional campaign would only amplify negative considerations towards the presidential administration (e.g., Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Record levels of political polarization and nationalized politics today entrench voters in their beliefs, increasing the likelihood of a referendum on the president's performance (Tuftte 1975; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2016).

It is possible that base closures may have trivial effects on House incumbent vote share due to the realignment aspect of base closures. Although scholars have documented the closure aspect of the BRAC process (e.g., Lee 2018), personnel shifts during installation realignments may influence the effects of base closures. Consider the Brooks City-Base in Texas' 23rd congressional district. When the Brooks City-Base was recommended for closure as part of the 2005 BRAC<sup>28</sup>, COBRA estimates indicated that the district would lose 1,253 military personnel and 1,268 civilian employees. However, Texas' 23rd also gained personnel as part of the 2005 BRAC. Fort Bliss received realignment forces from Fort Sill, Fort Hood, and numerous military installations in Germany and South Korea. These shifts resulted in an estimated gain of 12,708 military personnel, over five times greater than the combined losses at Brooks City-Base.

Additionally, those members of Congress who endured a major base closure may be less likely to seek reelection. Losing a key district resource would likely signal weakness to quality challengers seeking an opportunity for a winnable seat. Challengers seek opportunities to run for office (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Jacobson 1989), and would likely perceive

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<sup>28</sup>The Brooks AFB was slated for closure as part of the 1995 BRAC, but was removed from the recommendations list.

members who lost a base to be weak given that the member of Congress was unable to defend a key interest in their district. Prior work suggests that decreases in federal spending results in an increased likelihood of that incumbent member of Congress facing a quality challenger in the next election (Bickers and Stein 1996). That said, a difference of proportions test between incumbents seeking reelection and major base closures demonstrates no difference in the propensity of House incumbents to not seek re-election (Pearson Chi-square = 0.095,  $p = 0.758$ ).

Future research could investigate the effects of the BRAC on state-level legislators. Examining major base closures for state and county legislators may demonstrate stronger electoral penalties due to the smaller geographic constituencies that these elected officials often represent. Moreover, military installations were likely closed in a strategic fashion. In other words, it is difficult to disentangle the causal arrows of base selection at the congressional level. With state legislators, major base closures are likely exogenous to local considerations, as state lawmakers' concerns are less likely to register with Pentagon officials. This would permit a cleaner causal analysis to explore if base closures affect legislator fortunes, as they are muted for House members.



**Figure 1: The Effect of Major Base Closures on Incumbent Vote Share with Controls**

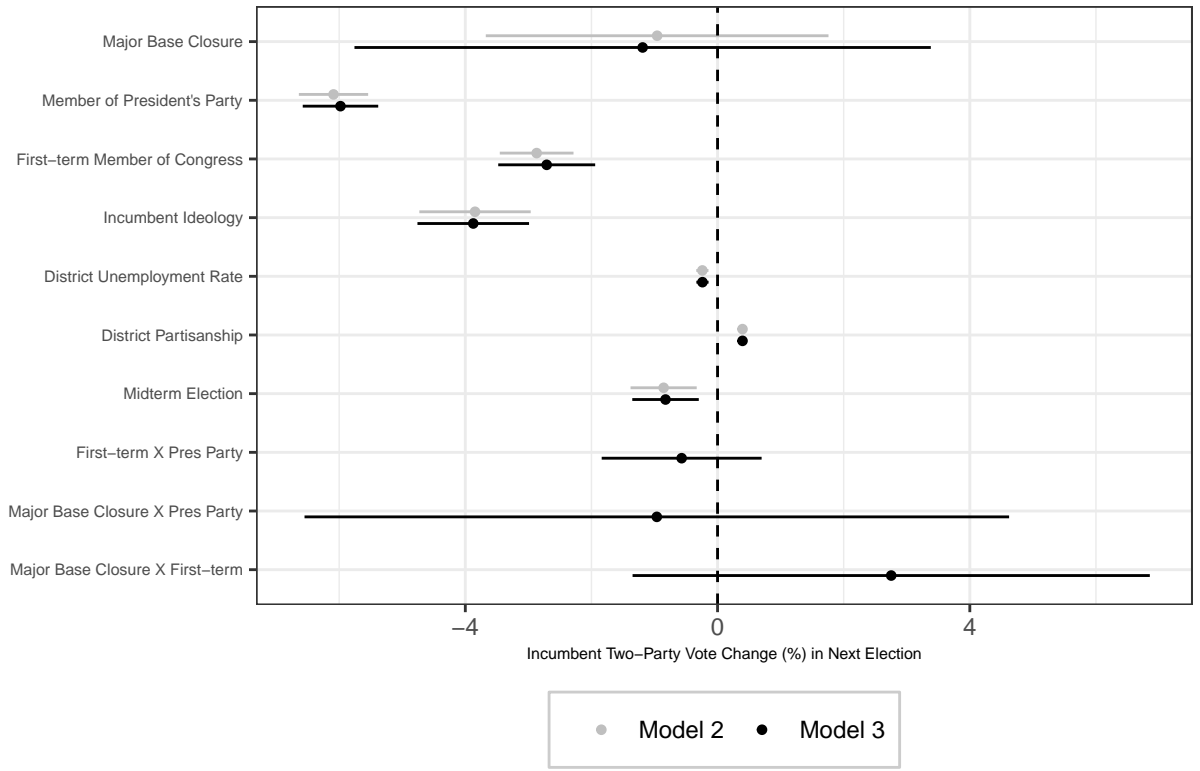


Table 1: The Effect of Major Base Closures on Incumbent Vote Share

	<b>Incumbent Two-Party Vote Share</b>		
	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
Major Base Closure	0.339 (1.182)	-0.958 (1.386)	-1.188 (2.331)
Member of President's Party		-6.090*** (0.280)	-5.979*** (0.305)
First-term Member of Congress		-2.869*** (0.298)	-2.709*** (0.392)
Incumbent Ideology		-3.846*** (0.450)	-3.874*** (0.452)
District Unemployment Rate		-0.241*** (0.049)	-0.240*** (0.049)
District Partisanship		0.395*** (0.015)	0.395*** (0.015)
Midterm Election		-0.855*** (0.268)	-0.825*** (0.269)
First-term X Pres Party			-0.570 (0.647)
Major Base Closure X Pres Party			-0.963 (2.850)
Major Base Closure X First-term			2.753 (2.092)
Fixed Effects?	District	District	District
Years	1974-2014	1980-2010	1980-2010
N	5268	3689	3689
R-squared	0.388	0.568	0.568
Adj. R-squared	0.325	0.501	0.501
Residual Std. Error	8.195	7.557	7.557

\*\*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .05; \*p < .1

# Appendix

## Appendix A.1: Endogenous BRAC Decisions?

Given concerns over the politicization of BRAC, it is imperative to identify potential selection biases in BRAC decisions.<sup>29</sup> Though the BRAC process was intendedly non-partisan<sup>30</sup>, military spending on aggregate is notoriously political (Mintz 2002). Notably, BRAC decisions may not have been exogenous to regional and local economic conditions (e.g., Lee 2018). During the 2005 BRAC Commission, the Department of Defense explicitly considered the “economic impact on existing communities in the vicinity of military installations” when selecting military installations for closure or realignment (Lepore 2012).

I test for potential relationships between local economic reliance and major base closure within a congressional district by regressing major base closures as a function of regional conditions.<sup>31</sup> Major base closures were coded as 1 for the congressional district where the majority of the base was located. Frequently, districts that are adjacent to a major base closure may also feel economic distress, but they are coded as 0 because the inter-district economic relationship is not precisely known.<sup>32</sup>

To identify the geographic distribution of military spending, I follow the approach of Nakamura and Steinsson (2014) in using the electronic database of DD-350 military procure-

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<sup>29</sup>Beyond the criteria provided by the Department of Defense, it is unclear how actual BRAC decisions are made. Despite renewed calls for a BRAC cycle, modern proponents are unclear of the decision-making calculus. For example, when prompted at a Cato Institute Policy Forum, Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee, was unaware of the specific details Smith and Preble (2018).

<sup>30</sup>Prior literature has found no evidence of political influence on base closings for the 2005 BRAC round Beaulier, Hall, and Lynch (2011).

<sup>31</sup>There are cases where multiple major bases closed within a single congressional district during a single BRAC cycle. However, these closures are collapsed into a dichotomous indicator since I seek to identify district-level conditions, not base-specific.

<sup>32</sup>Additionally, as previously noted, the BRAC recommendations do not indicate the full list of bases that were under consideration for closure. This limitation violates the positivity criterion of strong ignorability Rosenbaum and Rubin (1983), as not all districts have a positive probability as being selected for closure. However, spillover ramifications from a major base closure ought to minimize potential bias introduced. For example, Fort Monmouth’s 2005 closure is coded as New Jersey’s 12th congressional district, but its economic effects rippled throughout New Jersey, as well as areas within New York which had interstate contracts with Fort Monmouth (“Rethinking Fort Monmouth: Prospects & Opportunities” 2008).

ment forms available from the U.S. Department of Defense. The DD-350 forms document all military purchases greater than \$25,000 from 1984-2006, which account for roughly 90 percent of military purchases.<sup>33</sup> However, despite the richness of the DD-350 database, it is impossible to fully attribute the military procurement data on a district level. The DD-350 forms provide information about the primary contractor and where the majority of work was completed, but geo-coding the primary location does not address redistricting concerns or the scope of interstate subcontracting. To circumvent these concerns, the military procurement data is aggregated to the state level. Specifically, the DD-350 forms are analyzed as the percentage of state average per capita spending on military expenditures. This rougher indicator of military importance avoids the risk of potentially compounding measurement error. To control for district economic conditions, I use Foster-Molina's (2017) district-level unemployment and income data. The unemployment measure captures the percentage of the district's population that is unemployed yet still in the labor force, whereas the income measure is the mean income of a district's households.

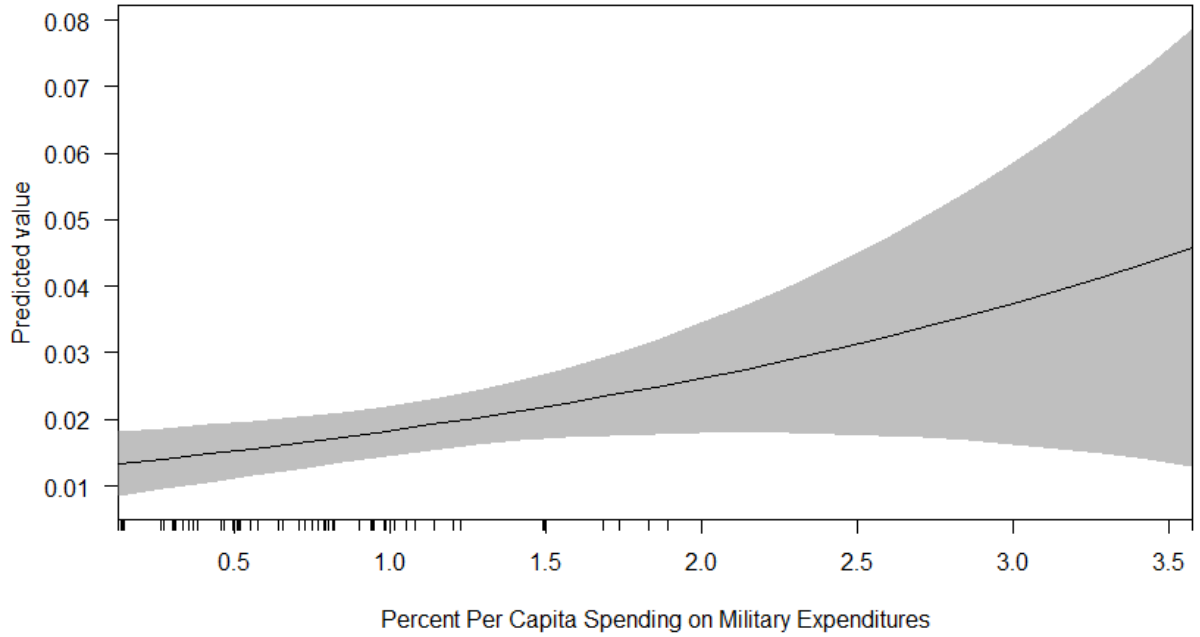
Table 2 reports the table results from regressing the likelihood of a major base closure on military procurement spending and district-level unemployment. Given the unintuitive nature of logistic coefficient estimates, Figures 2-4 illustrate the relationship between BRAC major base closures and economic covariates in terms of predicted probabilities. Across the three figures, major base closures are only slightly motivated by fiscal conditions. In Figure 2, percent average per capita spending on military expenditures is statistically significant, though this is to be expected since those states that spend more on military expenditures (e.g., Virginia, California) are also those with greater numbers of major military bases. By design, the estimated probability of base closure grows in magnitude as state military spending increases. With respect to Figures 3 and 4, both the district-level unemployment and mean income variables illustrate null effects on the likelihood of a major base closure. In addition to the confidence intervals overlapping the range of x-values, difference-in-means

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<sup>33</sup>DD-1057 forms summarize smaller transactions, but are unable to be geographically attributed. The DD-350 forms can be found at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=503>.

tests for both variables demonstrate that the point estimates do not statistically differ. The muted effects suggest that no observable conditions influenced the BRAC Commissions' recommendations.

**Figure 2: Major Base Closures Across State Military Expenditure Rates**



**Figure 3: Major Base Closures Across District Unemployment Rates**

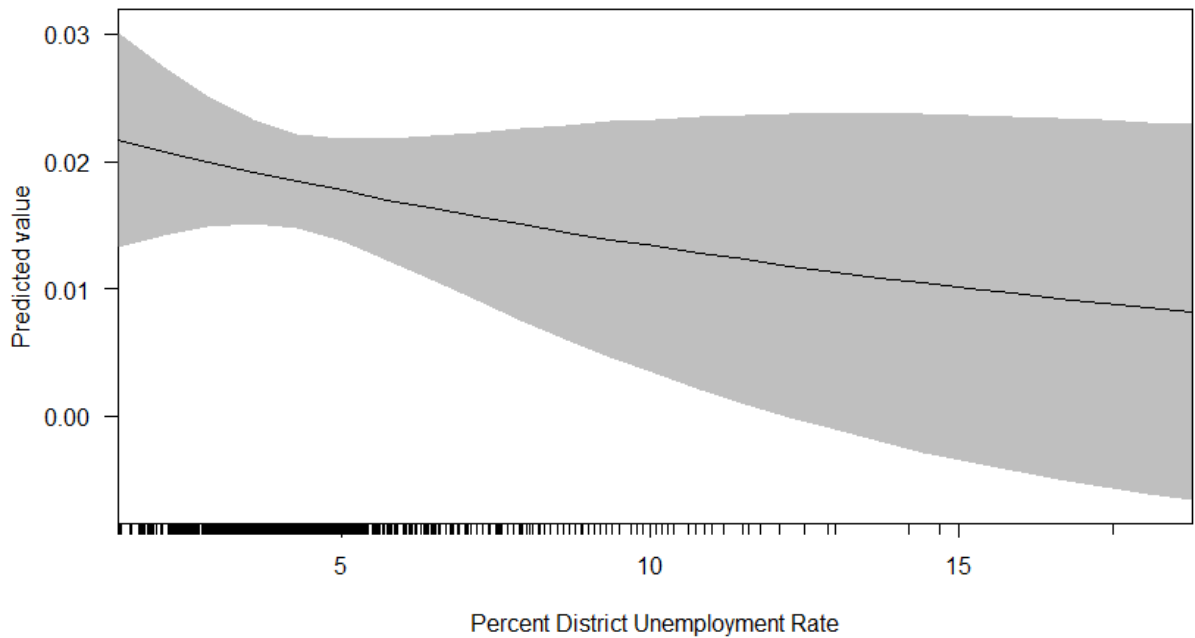
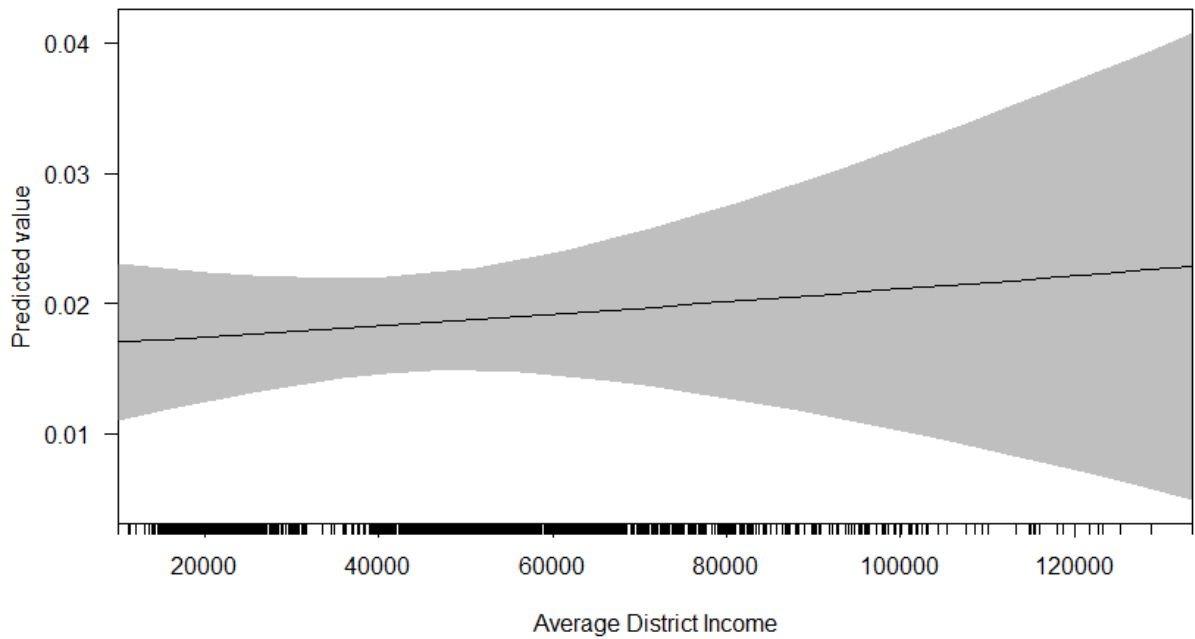


Table 2: Predicting Major Base Closures

	Log-Odds Ratio of Major Base Closure
Percent District Unemployment Rate	0.367** (0.152)
Average District Income	-0.057 (0.063)
Percent State Per Capita Military Expenditures	0.00000 (0.00000)
Constant	-4.207*** (0.370)
N	5102
Log Likelihood	-476.963
AIC	961.926

\*\*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .05; \*p < .1

Figure 4: Major Base Closures Across Average District Income



## Appendix B.1 - Main Results: 1988-2006

**Figure 5: The Effect of Major Base Closures on Incumbent Vote Share: 1988–2006**

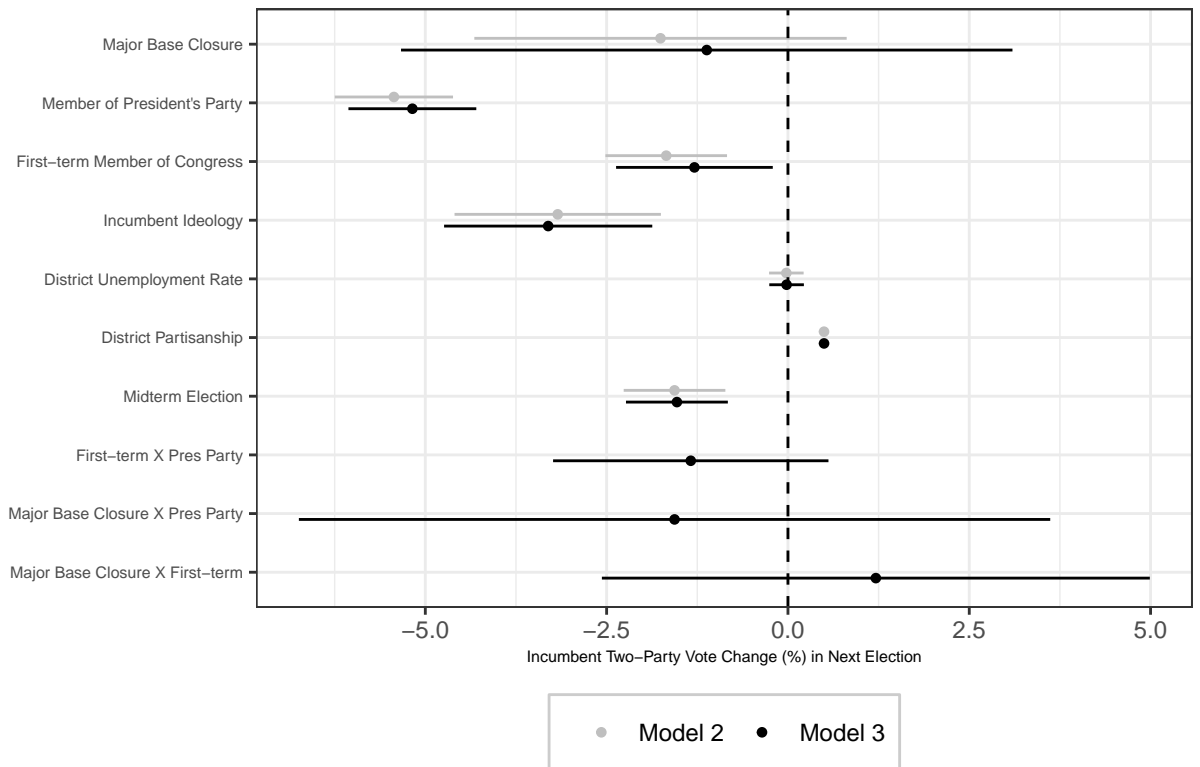


Table 3: The Effect of Major Base Closures on Incumbent Vote Share: 1988-2006

	<b>Incumbent Two-Party Vote Share</b>		
	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
Major Base Closure	-0.304 (1.089)	-1.757 (1.310)	-1.120 (2.151)
Member of President's Party		-5.433*** (0.416)	-5.179*** (0.450)
First-term Member of Congress		-1.678*** (0.428)	-1.289** (0.551)
Incumbent Ideology		-3.174*** (0.726)	-3.306*** (0.732)
District Unemployment Rate		-0.022 (0.122)	-0.019 (0.122)
District Partisanship		0.497*** (0.027)	0.498*** (0.027)
Midterm Election		-1.564*** (0.358)	-1.531*** (0.358)
First-term X Pres Party			-1.340 (0.969)
Major Base Closure X Pres Party			-1.564 (2.643)
Major Base Closure X First-term			1.212 (1.927)
Fixed Effects?	District	District	District
Years	1988-2006	1988-2006	1988-2006
N	2527	1532	1532
R-squared	0.546	0.746	0.747
Adj. R-squared	0.445	0.639	0.639
Residual Std. Error	7.052	6.254	6.255

\*\*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .05; \*p < .1



## Appendix B.2 - Two-Way Fixed Effects Models

**Figure 6: The Effect of Major Base Closures on Incumbent Vote Share: Two-way FE**

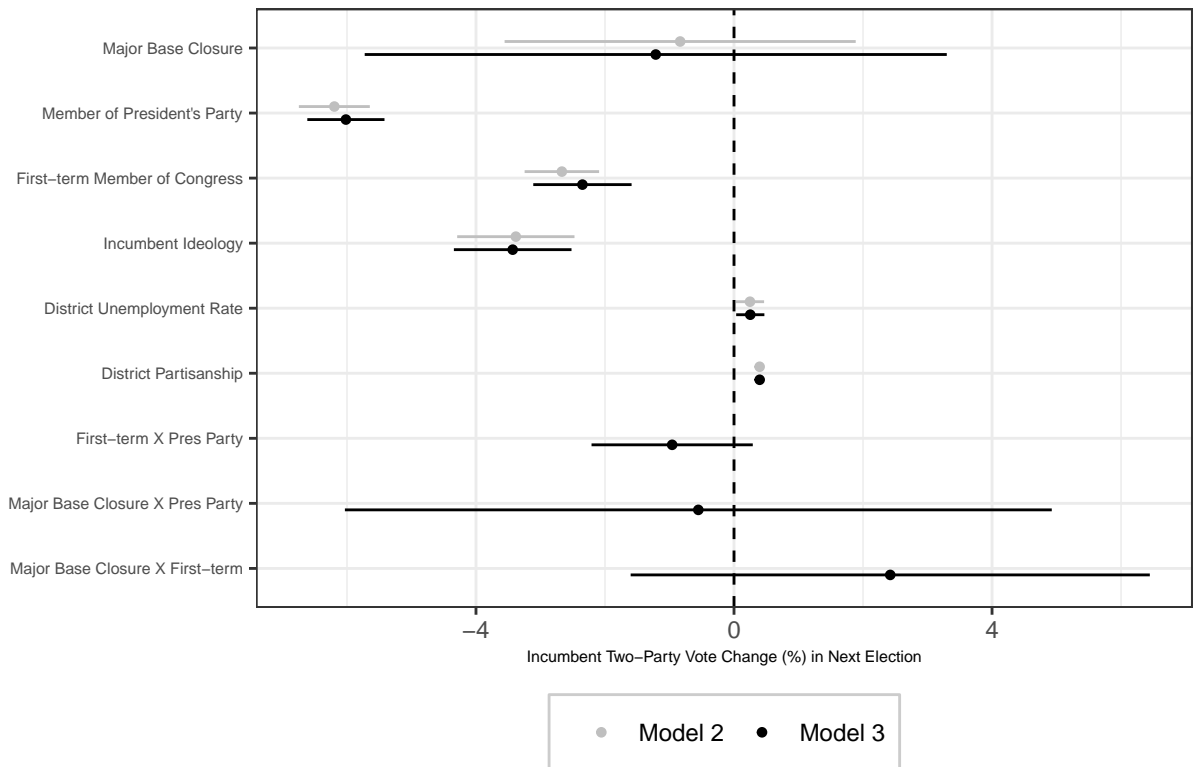


Table 4: Two-way Fixed Effects Models of Major Base Closures on Incumbent Vote Share

	<b>Incumbent Two-Party Vote Share</b>		
	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
Major Base Closure	0.639 (1.182)	-0.835 (1.389)	-1.213 (2.302)
Member of President's Party		-6.196*** (0.281)	-6.017*** (0.305)
First-term Member of Congress		-2.669*** (0.295)	-2.350*** (0.389)
District Unemployment Rate		-3.382*** (0.464)	-3.431*** (0.465)
District Partisanship		0.247** (0.112)	0.252** (0.112)
Incumbent Ideology		0.397*** (0.015)	0.398*** (0.015)
First-term X Pres Party			-0.959 (0.638)
Major Base Closure X Pres Party			-0.553 (2.796)
Major Base Closure X First-term			2.422 (2.053)
Fixed Effects?	District and Year	District and Year	District and Year
Years	1974-2014	1980-2010	1980-2010
N	5268	3689	3689
R-squared	0.412	0.587	0.588
Adj. R-squared	0.350	0.522	0.522
Residual Std. Error	8.046	7.400	7.399

\*\*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .05; \*p < .1

Notes: The Midterm Election variable is omitted as it is perfectly collinear with the Year fixed effect.

## Appendix B.3 - Main Results with Post-treatment Variables Included

**Figure 7: The Effect of Major Base Closures on Incumbent Vote Share: Post-treatment Variables**

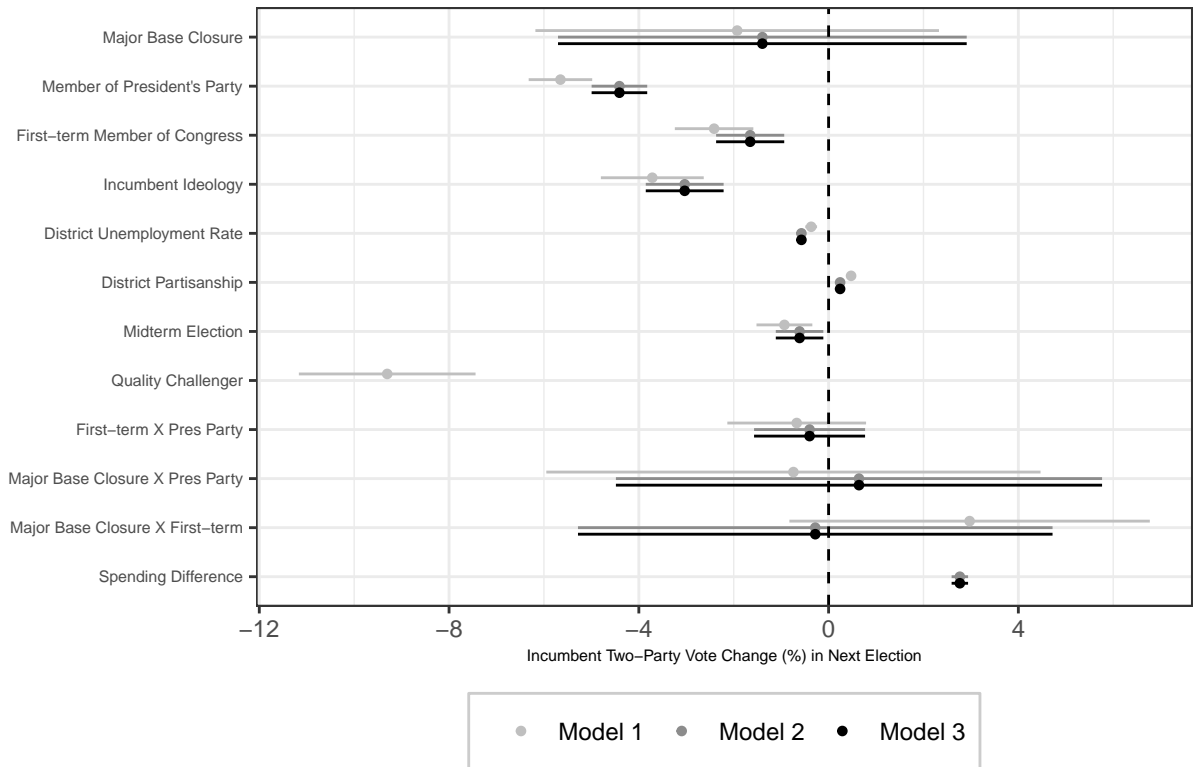


Table 5: The Effect of Major Base Closures on Incumbent Vote Share

	<b>Incumbent Two-Party Vote Share</b>		
	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
Major Base Closure	-1.927 (2.170)	-1.396 (2.198)	-0.795 (2.139)
Member of President's Party	-5.652*** (0.342)	-4.409*** (0.299)	-4.247*** (0.358)
First-term Member of Congress	-2.413*** (0.422)	-1.653*** (0.366)	-1.680*** (0.411)
District Unemployment Rate	-3.716*** (0.553)	-3.033*** (0.419)	-2.864*** (0.534)
District Partisanship	-0.367*** (0.063)	-0.573*** (0.049)	-0.458*** (0.065)
Midterm Election	0.474*** (0.018)	0.243*** (0.015)	0.322*** (0.019)
Incumbent Ideology	-0.931*** (0.300)	-0.612** (0.256)	-1.188*** (0.304)
Quality Challenger	-9.304*** (0.950)		-5.816*** (0.858)
Spending Difference		2.767*** (0.088)	2.440*** (0.111)
First-term X Pres Party	-0.672 (0.746)	-0.401 (0.597)	-0.518 (0.720)
Major Base Closure X Pres Party	-0.741 (2.658)	0.641 (2.614)	-0.255 (2.545)
Major Base Closure X First-term	2.973 (1.938)	-0.281 (2.552)	0.913 (2.498)
Fixed Effects?	District	District	District
Years	1980-2010	1980-2010	1980-2010
N	2494	3081	1959
R-squared	0.684	0.647	0.731
Adj. R-squared	0.609	0.579	0.647
Residual Std. Error	6.788	6.475	5.911

\*\*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .05; \*p < .1

## Appendix C.1 - Base Closure Information

Table 6: List of Major Base Closures

Installation	Year
Alabama Ammunition Plant, Alabama	1988
Hamilton Army Airfield, California	1988
Presidio of San Francisco, California	1988
Fort Sheridan, Illinois	1988
Indiana Ammunition Plant, Indiana	1988
Jefferson Proving Ground, Indiana	1988
Lexington Army Depot, Kentucky	1988
New Orleans Military Ocean Terminal, Louisiana	1988
Army Material Technology Laboratory, Massachusetts	1988
Fort Douglas, Utah	1988
Cameron Station, Virginia	1988
Naval Station Lake Charles, Louisiana	1988
Naval Station New York, New York	1988
Naval Hospital Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	1988
Naval Station Galveston, Texas	1988
Naval Station San Francisco (Hunters Point Annex), California	1988
George Air Force Base, California	1988
Mather Air Force Base, California	1988
Norton Air Force Base, California	1988
Chanute Air Force Base, Illinois	1988
Pease Air Force Base, New Hampshire	1988
Fort Ord, California	1991

Installation	Year
Sacramento Army Depot, California	1991
Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana	1991
Fort Devens, Massachusetts	1991
Harry Diamond Army Research Laboratory, Virginia	1991
MCAS Tustin, California	1991
NAS Moffett Field, California	1991
NAV Hospital Long Beach, California	1991
NAVSTA Long Beach, California	1991
NAVSTA Treasure Island (Hunters Point Annex), California	1991
NAVSTA Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	1991
NSY Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	1991
CBC Davisville, Rhode Island	1991
NAS Chase Field, Texas	1991
NAVSTA Puget Sound (Sand Point), Washington	1991
Eaker Air Force Base, Arkansas	1991
Williams Air Force Base, Arizona	1991
Castle Air Force Base, California	1991
Lowry Air Force Base, Colorado	1991
Grissom Air Force Base, Indiana	1991
England Air Force Base, Louisiana	1991
Loring Air Force Base, Maine	1991
Wurtsmith Air Force Base, Michigan	1991
Richards-Gebaur Air Force Base, Missouri	1991
Rickenbacker Air Guard Base, Ohio	1991
Myrtle Beach Air Force Base, South Carolina	1991

Installation	Year
Bergstrom Air Force Base, Texas	1991
Carswell Air Force Base, Texas	1991
Vint Hill Farms, Virginia	1993
Naval Station Mobile, Alabama	1993
Naval Shipyard Mare Island, California	1993
Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, California	1993
Naval Air Station Alameda, California	1993
Naval Aviation Depot Alameda, California	1993
Naval Hospital Oakland, California	1993
Naval Station Treasure Island, California	1993
Naval Training Center San Diego, California	1993
Naval Air Station Cecil Field, Florida	1993
Naval Aviation Depot Pensacola, Florida	1993
Naval Training Center Orlando, FLorida	1993
Naval Air Station Barbers Point, Hawaii	1993
Naval Air Station Glenview, Illinois	1993
Naval Electronic Systems Engineering Center St. Inigoes, Maryland	1993
Naval Station Staten Island, New York	1993
Naval Shipyard Charleston, South Carolina	1993
Naval Station Charleston, South Carolina	1993
Naval Air Station Dallas, Texas	1993
Naval Aviation Depot Norfolk, Virginia	1993
Homestead Air Force Base, FLorida	1993
O'Hare International Aprt Air Force Reserve Station, Illinois	1993
K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Michigan	1993

Installation	Year
Plattsburgh Air Force Base, New York	1993
Gentile Air Force Station, Ohio	1993
Newark Air Force Base, Ohio	1993
Defense Personnel Support Center Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	1993
Fort McClellan, Alabama	1995
Fort Chaffee, Arkansas	1995
Oakland Army Base, California	1995
Fitzsimons Army Medical Center, Colorado	1995
Savanna Army Depot Activity, Illinois	1995
Fort Holabird, Maryland	1995
Fort Ritchie, Maryland	1995
Bayonne Military Ocean Terminal, New Jersey	1995
Seneca Army Depot, New York	1995
Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania	1995
Fort Pickett, Virginia	1995
Naval Air Facility Adak, Alaska	1995
Fleet Industrial Supply Center Oakland, California	1995
Naval Shipyard Long Beach, California	1995
Naval Air Station South Weymouth, Massachusetts	1995
McClellan AFB, California	1995
Bergstrom Air Reserve Base, Texas	1995
Reese Air Force Base, Texas	1995
Defense Distribution Depot Memphis, Tennessee	1995
Defense Distribution Depot Ogden, Utah	1995
Riverbank Army Ammunition Plant, California	2005



Installation	Year
Fort Gillem, Georgia	2005
Fort McPherson, Georgia	2005
Kansas Army Ammunition Plant, Kansas	2005
Mississippi Army Ammunition Plant, Mississippi	2005
Fort Monmouth, New Jersey	2005
Umatilla Chemical Depot, Oregon	2005
Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant, Texas	2005
Fort Monroe, Virginia	2005
Naval Air Station Atlanta, Georgia	2005
Naval Station Pascagoula, Mississippi	2005
Naval Air Station Willow Grove, Pennsylvania	2005
Naval Station Ingleside, Texas	2005
Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine	2005
Onizuka Air Force Station, California	2005
Brooks City Base, Texas	2005
Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico	2005

Table 7: Major Base Closures Count by District

State	Year - 1988	Year - 1991	Year - 1993	Year - 1995	Year - 2005
Alabama	1	0	1	1	0
Alaska	0	0	0	1	1
Arizona	0	1	0	0	0
Arkansas	0	1	0	1	0
California	4	8	5	2	2

State	Year - 1988	Year - 1991	Year - 1993	Year - 1995	Year - 2005
Colorado	0	1	0	1	0
Connecticut	0	0	0	0	0
Delaware	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	0	0	4	0	0
Georgia	0	0	0	0	2
Hawaii	0	0	2	0	0
Idaho	0	0	0	0	0
Illinois	2	0	2	1	0
Indiana	1	2	0	0	0
Iowa	0	0	0	0	0
Kansas	0	0	0	0	1
Kentucky	1	0	0	0	0
Louisiana	2	1	0	0	0
Maine	0	1	0	0	1
Maryland	0	0	1	2	0
Massachusetts	0	1	0	1	0
Michigan	0	1	1	0	0
Minnesota	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0
Missouri	0	1	0	0	0
Montana	0	0	0	0	0
Nebraska	0	0	0	0	0
Nevada	0	0	0	0	0
New Hampshire	1	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	0	0	0	0	1

State	Year - 1988	Year - 1991	Year - 1993	Year - 1995	Year - 2005
New Mexico	0	0	0	0	0
New York	1	0	2	1	0
North Carolina	0	0	0	0	0
North Dakota	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio	0	1	2	0	0
Oklahoma	0	0	0	0	0
Oregon	0	0	0	0	0
Pennsylvania	1	1	2	0	2
Rhode Island	0	1	0	0	0
South Carolina	0	1	1	0	0
South Dakota	0	0	0	0	0
Tennessee	0	0	0	1	0
Texas	1	3	1	1	3
Utah	1	0	0	1	0
Vermont	0	0	0	0	0
Virginia	1	1	2	1	2
Washington	0	1	0	0	0
West Virginia	0	0	0	0	0
Wisconsin	0	0	0	0	0
Wyoming	0	0	0	0	0
Total	18	26	26	15	15

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