

Field Seminar - Congressional Elections and Competitiveness
Sponsored by the Alexander Hamilton Center at NYU
Wed 2-4:30, 25 West 4th Street, Room C-3 — V53.0395.02
Preliminary Syllabus - August 26, 2008

Professor Jonathan Nagler
Office: 19 W. 4th Street - room 307
jonathan.nagler@nyu.edu

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Office Hours: Thurs 3-4:00
Phone: 212 992 7696

A prominent fact of congressional elections in the United States is the frequency with which they are won by incumbents. The lack of competition in these elections will be the focus of this course. To understand this lack of competition we will cover considerable ground: the basic facts of re-election rates, the amount of money spent by incumbents and challengers, and the nature of congressional districts. We will also cover existing theories and evidence about the behavior of voters that maintains so many incumbents in office: including the impact of issues, the impact of campaign spending, and whether or not voters have become more polarized. In trying to understand why congressional elections have become so uncompetitive we will look at possible reforms to increase competitiveness. The two areas that we will focus most closely on are campaign finance reform, and redistricting reform. We will also consider the impact of the behavior of the major parties on the competitiveness of elections, and examine how changes in party strategies could lead to more competitive elections.

The course will consist of a mix of lectures and student presentations. Each week 1 or more students will be selected to present some portion of the week's reading, and/or additional readings beyond what are assigned to everyone, and turn in a short (4-6 page) paper.

Your grade will be based on the following

Class Participation:	15 %
Short Papers	60 %
Final Paper (8-10 pages) :	25 %

Class attendance is required (you cannot pass the class with a failing grade for class participation). And you are expected to pay attention to regular emails and updates to the syllabus.

Required Texts:

Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, 2006, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2nd edition, Pearson Longman, New York, NY.

Jacobson, Gary C., 2004, *The Politics Of Congressional Elections*, 6th edition, Pearson Longman, New York, NY. ISBN: 0321100409.

1 Course Overview and Voting Overview

- Lecture on Elections Research

2 Context and Candidates (Week 2)

- Rules: redistricting, spending.
 - **Read:** Jacobson, *PCE* Chapters 1, 2.
- Basic Facts about Re-election Rates
 1. **Read:** Issacharoff, Samuel and Jonathan Nagler. 2007. “Protected from Politics: Diminishing Margins of Electoral Competition in U.S. Congressional Elections”, *Ohio State Law Journal*.
 2. **Read:** Jacobson, *PCE*, Chapters 3.1, 3.2.
- Basic Facts About Campaign Wins and Money
 - Victory Rate by Campaign Spending for Challengers/Incumbents.
 - Victory Rate by Difference and Ratio in Campaign Spending for Challengers/Incumbents.
 - Spending by: Incumbents, Challengers, High-Quality Challengers
 - **Read:** Jacobson, *PCE*, Chapter 3.3
- Basic Facts about Campaign Contributions
 - Contributions by: Pacs, Individuals.
 - Contributions by Pacs/Individuals to: Incumbents/Challengers and Democrats/Republicans
 - **Read:** Jacobson, *PCE*, chapters 4

3 Models of Voting (Week 2 and 3)

- Economic Voting – Gods of Vengeance and National Tides
- **Read:**
 1. Kramer, Gerry. 1971. “Short-Term Fluctuations in U.S. Voting Behavior, 1896-1964.” *American Political Science Review* 65:131–143.
 2. **Optional Reading:**
 - Hibbing, J. R. and J. R. Alford. 1981. “The Electoral Impact of Economic-Conditions - Who Is Held Responsible.” *American Journal of Political Science* 25(3):423–429.
- The Spatial Model – How Issues Matter
 1. **Read:** Ansolabehere, S., J. M. Snyder and C. Stewart. 2001. “Candidate Positioning in US House Elections.” *American Journal of Political Science* 45(1):136–159.
 2. **Optional Reading:**
 - *Analytical Politics*, selected chapters.

4 Models of Partisanship (Week 3)

- Socialization
- Retrospective Party ID
- Basic Demographics Facts: Who is a Democrat and Who is a Republican
- **READ:**
 1. Abramowitz, Alan. 2004. *Voice of the People: Elections and Voting in the United States*, McGraw Hill. [Chapter 3.] - “The Parties in the Electorate”, p. 73-102.
 2. Bartels, L.M. 2000. “Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996.” *American Journal of Political Science* 44:35–50.
 3. **Optional Reading:**
 - Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Selected Chapters]
 - Fiorina, Morris P. 1978. “Economic Retrospective Voting in American National Elections: A Micro-Analysis.” *American Journal of Political Science* 22:426–443.

5 Polarization (Week 4)

- Polarization of Parties in Congress
- Polarization of Voters (????)
- **Read:**
 1. Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, 2006, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2nd edition, Pearson Longman, New York, NY.

6 Mobilization and Turnout - Who Votes? (Week 5)

- Basic Demographic Facts of Turnout: Who Votes?
- Election-Specific Causes of Variation in Turnout:
 - Closeness of the Election
 - Campaign Spending
 - Negative Campaign Spending
 - Policy Positions of Candidates: Alienation and Indifference
- **READ:**
 1. Freedman, P. and K. Goldstein. 1999. “Measuring Media Exposure and the Effects of Negative Campaign Ads.” *American Journal of Political Science* 43(4):1189–1208.
 2. Kahn, K. F. and P. J. Kenney. 1999. “Do Negative Campaigns Mobilize or Suppress Turnout? Clarifying the Relationship Between Negativity and Participation.” *American Political Science Review* 93(4):877–889.
 3. Zipp, John F. 1985. “Perceived Representativeness and Voting: An Assessment of the Impact of “Choices” vs. “Echoes”.” *American Political Science Review* 79:50–61.

4. Optional Reading:

- Ansolabehere, S. D., S. Iyengar and A. Simon. 1999. “Replicating Experiments Using Aggregate and Survey Data: The Case of Negative Advertising and Turnout.” *American Political Science Review* 93(4):901–909.
- Leighley, Jan E. and Jonathan Nagler. 1992a. “Individual and Systemic Influences on Turnout - Who Votes, 1984.” *Journal of Politics* 54:718–740.

5. Very Optional Reading:

- Jackson, R. A. 1996. “The Mobilization of Congressional Electorates.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 21(3):425–445.
- Jackson, R. A. and T. M. Carsey. 2007. “US Senate Campaigns, Negative Advertising, and Voter Mobilization in the 1998 Midterm Election.” *Electoral Studies* 26(1):180–195.

7 Measuring and Defining the ‘Incumbency Advantage’ (Week 6)

- Why A Low Limit on Campaign Spending Would Guarantee Incumbent Re-Election
- The Sophomore Surge, The Retirement Slump, The Slurge
- The King-Gelman Model
- **Read:**

1. Cox, G. W. and J. N. Katz. 1996. “Why Did the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections Grow?” *American Journal of Political Science* 40(2):478–497.
 2. Carson, J.L., E.J. Engstrom and J.M. Roberts. 2007. “Candidate Quality, the Personal Vote, and the Incumbency Advantage in Congress.” *American Political Science Review* 101:289–302.
 3. Ansolabehere, S., J. M. Snyder and C. Stewart. 2000. “Old Voters, New Voters, and the Personal Vote: Using Redistricting to Measure the Incumbency Advantage.” *American Journal of Political Science* 44(1):17–34.
4. Optional Reading:
- Gelman, A. and G. King. 1990. “Estimating Incumbency Advantage Without Bias.” *American Journal of Political Science* 34(4):1142–1164.

8 Redistricting (Week 7)

- Basic Facts: When are states redistricted
- Relationship Between Redistricted Districts and Election Results
- Not Redistricted: Senate Elections versus House Elections
- **Read:**

1. Forgette, R. and G. Platt. 2005. “Redistricting Principles and Incumbency Protection in the US Congress.” *Political Geography* 24(8):934–951.
2. Issacharoff, Samuel. 2002. “Gerrymandering and Political Cartels.” *Harvard Law Review* 116(2):593–648.
3. Abramowitz, A. I., B. Alexander and M. Gunning. 2006. “Incumbency, Redistricting, and the Decline of Competition in US House Elections.” *Journal of Politics* 68(1):75–88.

9 Effects of Campaign Spending

- Problems in Measuring the Effects of Campaign Spending
- Media Markets
- War Chests
- **Read:**
 1. Ansolabehere, S. and A. Gerber. 1994. "The Mismeasure of Campaign Spending - Evidence from the 1990 United-States House Elections." *Journal of Politics* 56(4):1106–1118.
 2. Ansolabehere, Stephen, John M. de Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder. 2003. "Why is There So Little Money in U.S. Politics?", *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17: 105-130.

10 Challenger Quality Revisited

- Changes over Time in Challenger Quality
- **Read:**
 1. Goodliffe, J. 2007. "Campaign War Chests and Challenger Quality in Senate Elections." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32(1):135–156.
 2. Goodliffe, J. 2001. "The Effect of War Chests on Challenger Entry in US House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(4):830–844.
 3. Abramowitz, A. I. 1991. "Incumbency, Campaign Spending, and the Decline of Competition in United-States House Elections." *Journal of Politics* 53(1):34–56.

11 Public Funding in the States

- **Reading:** "TBA"

12 Effects of Term Limits on State Legislatures

- Changing the Challenger Pool - Has it Helped?
- **Read:**
 1. "TBA"