Electoral Dynamics: The Role of Campaign Context in Voting Choice

Carlos Algara
calgara@ucdavis.edu

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Agenda

1. Incumbency
2. Partisanship
3. Campaign Resources
4. Collective Responsibility
### Models of Electoral Control

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<th>Heuristic</th>
<th>Vote-Choice Model</th>
<th>Implications for Representatives</th>
<th>Analytical Purposes</th>
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<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Spatial/Proximity Voting</td>
<td>Responsive to Median Voter</td>
<td>Representation &amp; Candidate Positioning</td>
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<td>Partisanship</td>
<td>Michigan Model</td>
<td>Responsive to Partisan Base</td>
<td>Explaining vote choice/partisan bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>Retrospective Model/Valence Rule</td>
<td>Develop reputation, (honesty/integrity), monitor economy</td>
<td>Explaining electoral outcomes, pres. forecasting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Partisanship & ideology are generally prospective models.

- **Opening Question:** Which model of electoral choice do you think reduces the information cost of voting the *most*? What is one potential pitfall for the model of your choice?
Decline in Competition in House Elections

Percentage of Competitive U.S. House Elections, 1946-2016

Seat Competitiveness
- < 20%
- < 15%
- < 10%
- < 5%

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Decline in Competition in Senate Elections

Percentage of Competitive U.S. Senate Elections, 1920-2016

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Percentage of Senate Seats

High Re-election Rates by Seat-Type

Smoothed lowess regression curve illustrated to show trend in incumbent re-election by seat-type over cycle.
Importance of an Incumbency Advantage

Why do you think American elections are so noncompetitive?
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  - “Perks of office” such as service & committee membership
  - Ability to scare potential quality challengers
Declining Worth of Incumbency in Congressional Elections

Estimated Incumbency Advantage

- U.S. House
- U.S. Senate

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What do Abramowitz et al. find with respect to the relationship between incumbency & decline in competition?
Incumbency Continued

- What do Abramowitz et al. find with respect to the relationship between incumbency & decline in competition?
- Non-open seats more competitive than incumbent re-elections, why?
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### Open Seats & Variation in Campaign Spending

#### Table 2  Competition in Marginal House Districts by Type of Contest, 2002–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Winner’s % of House Vote</th>
<th>Open Seat</th>
<th>Running Incumbent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or 70+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–70</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55–60</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 3  Competition in High-Risk Incumbent Districts by Challenger Spending, 1998–2002

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Challenger’s % of Vote</th>
<th>Challenger Spending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$0–499,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT 30</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–45</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winners (n)</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(132)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Marginal districts are those in which Democratic presidential candidate's percentage of major party vote is within 5 points of national percentage.

**Source:** Data compiled by authors.
What do Abramowitz et al. find with respect to the relationship between incumbency & decline in competition?

Non-open seats more competitive than incumbent re-elections, why?

Experienced quality candidates more likely to emerge in open seat races

Why are experience candidates desirable for parties & why are they strategic?
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- What about support for gerrymandering hypotheses (i.e. redistricting)?
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What about support for gerrymandering hypotheses (i.e. redistricting)?
Lack of support for the *Redistricting* Hypothesis

Numbers of Safe & Competitive Districts Before & After Redistricting, 1970–2012
No support for the hypothesis: redistricting $\rightarrow \downarrow$ competitive
No support for the hypothesis: redistricting → ↓ competitive

Salience of Redistricting as an explanation

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  “both parties have succeeded in drawing district lines in ways that cement their current power by eliminating contested elections . . . most states were drawn to protect incumbents from the inconvenience of competition”
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Decline of Split-Ticket Voting in Congressional Elections

Number of House Members Representing Districts Won by Opposing Party's Presidential Nominee, 1952-2016

- Republicans
- Democrats
- Total
Decline of Split-Ticket Voting in Congressional Elections

Number of Senators Representing States
Won by Opposing Party's Presidential Nominee, 1920-2014

- Republicans
- Democrats
- Total

Number of U.S. Senators


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- Is there a trade-off between partisanship & incumbency effects in congressional elections?
- Potential implications of ↑ partisanship effect in election outcomes on valence model of vote choice?
Smoothed lowess regression curve fitted to illustrate trend in coefficient estimate across yearly models. Bivariate district-level OLS model specified: DemVote ~ DemPresVote
Growing Strength of Partisan Explanation

Variance in Congressional Election Outcomes accounted for by District Presidential Outcomes, 1952-2016

Adjusted R² of Yearly Models

- U.S. House
- U.S. Senate
Consider the following Prisoner’s Dilemma

Choosing Negative Advertisements: A Prisoner’s Dilemma

RED CANDIDATE

Positive | Negative
--- | ---
A competitive election in which both candidates emerge with an unscathed reputation. | Blue loses

BLUE CANDIDATE

Positive | Negative
--- | ---
Blue wins | Red loses

A competitive election in which both candidates emerge with a damaged reputation.

What’s the logic behind the game? Can you apply this to campaign spending generally?
Campaign funds from individuals & PACS allow candidates to invest in campaign infrastructure, boost name recognition (ads), project policy positions, and define opponent (valence & policy positions).
Campaign Spending Cont.

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Campaign resources used primarily for *mobilization* rather than *conversion* given precancel of partisan & spatial models in explaining vote-choice.
Distribution of Campaign Spending, U.S. House

Democratic & Republican Campaign Spending in U.S. House Elections, 1972-2014
Distribution of Campaign Spending, U.S. Senate

Democratic & Republican Campaign Spending in U.S. Senate Elections, 1980-2016
Independent Effect of Campaign Spending on Elections

dem_spending_diff effect plot

dem_vote

dem_spending_diff

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Increased Nationalization of Congressional Elections

- What evidence that congressional elections are becoming less *local* and more *nationalized*?
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- If correlated, evidence for collective accountability & increased ‘presidentialization’ of congressional elections
Punishing the President’s Party in Congress

Predicted Change in President's Party House Seatshare by Presidential Approval, 1938-2016

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Punishing the President’s Party in the Senate

Predicted Change in President’s Party Senate Seatshare by Presidential Approval, 1938-2016
Key Points:

- Congressional elections becoming less competitive
- Safe & marginal seats are becoming safer for parties while seats that favor other party are becoming more precarious
- Incumbents still hold an advantage, but shrinking as elections become more partisan
- Redistricting plays very marginal role in shaping campaign context
- Partisanship effect on electoral outcomes increasing in congressional elections
- Campaign spending dynamic in nature, thus canceling out as effect on election outcomes
- President’s party generally fares poorly in midterm elections, function of approval.
- Consider if Madison would have a problem with role of campaign context in vote-choice