Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals

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Party gains and losses in House seats constitute one instrument, however imperfect, for voter influence on the national government, Mayhew suggests. But the data indicate that "the House seat swing is a phenomenon of fast declining amplitude and therefore of fast declining significance." In the 1956–72 period the number of districts with close House elections dropped precipitously; a similar, if slow, long-range decline has been occurring. We don't really know the causes, but Mayhew indicates possible causes and asks us to ponder the consequences. The piece is replete with numbers, but clearly they are handmaiden to an inquiry into politics. The paper was originally presented at the Spring, 1973 New England Political Science Association meetings.

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Of the electoral instruments voters have used to influence American national government few have been more important than the biennial "net partisan swing" in United States House membership. Since Jacksonian times ups and downs in party seat holdings in the House have supplied an important form of party linkage.

The seat swing is, in practice, a two-step phenomenon. For a party to register a net gain in House seats there must occur (*a*) a gain (over the last election) in the national proportion of popular votes cast for House candidates of the party in question. That is, the party must be the beneficiary of a national trend in popular voting for the House.[1] But there must also

1. To put it yet another way, voting for House candidates must have a "national

occur (*b*) a translation of popular vote gains into seat gains.[2] Having the former without the latter might be interesting but it would not be very important.

The causes of popular vote swings have only recently been traced with any precision. There is voter behavior that produces the familiar mid-term sag for parties in control of the presidency.[3] There is the long-run close relation between changes in economic indices and changes in the House popular vote.[4] There are doubtless other matters that can give a national cast to House voting, including wars. [5]

The consequences of partisan seat swings (built on popular vote swings) have been more elusive but no less arresting. As in the case of the Great Society Congress (1965–1966), House newcomers can supply the votes to pass bills that could not have been passed without them. Presidents with ambitious domestic programs (Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson) have relied heavily on the votes of temporarily augmented Democratic House majorities. No clear argument can be made, of course, that a bill-passing binge like that of 1965–1966 offers a direct conversion of popular wishes into laws. The evidence is more ambiguous. At the least a House election like the one of 1964 produces a rotation of government elites that has policy consequences; at the most there is some detectable relation between what such temporarily empowered elites do and what popular wishes are. Over time the working of the seat swing has sometimes given a dialectical cast to national policy-making, with successive elites making successive policy approximations. A case in point is the enactment of the Wagner Act in the Democratic Seventy-fourth Congress followed by its Taft-Hartley revision in the Republican Eightieth. Because of all the translation uncertainties the House seat swing has been a decidedly blunt voter instrument, but it has been a noteworthy instrument nonetheless.

The foregoing is a preface to a discussion of some recent election data. The data, for the years 1956–1972, suggest strongly that the House seat

component" to it. See Donald E. Stokes, "Parties and the Nationalization of Electoral Forces," ch. 7 in William N. Chambers and Walter D. Burnham, *The American Party Systems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

2. The best analysis of translation formulas is in Edward R. Tufte, "The Relation Between Seats and Votes in Two Party Systems," *American Political Science Review*, 67 (June, 1973), 540–554.

3. Angus Campbell, "Surge and Decline: A study in Electoral Change," ch. 3 in Campbell et al., *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley, 1966).

4. Gerald H. Kramer, "Short-Term Fluctuations in U.S. Voting Behavior, 1896–1964," *American Political Science Review*, 65 (1971), 131–143.

5. Ibid., p. 140.

swing is a phenomenon of fast declining amplitude and therefore of fast declining significance. The first task here will be to lay out the data—in nearly raw form—in order to give a sense of their shape and flow. The second task will be to speculate about causes of the pattern in the data, the third to ponder the implications of this pattern.

I.

The data are presented in Figure 1, an array of 22 bar graphs that runs on for five pages. If the pages are turned sideways and read as if they were one long multi-page display, the graphs appear in three columns of nine, nine, and four. It will be useful to begin with an examination of the four graphs in the right-hand column.

Each of the four right-hand graphs is a frequency distribution in which congressional districts are sorted according to percentages of the major-party presidential vote cast in them in one of the four presidential elections of the years 1956–1968.[6] The districts are cumulated vertically in percentages of the total district set of 435 rather than in absolute numbers. The horizontal axis has column intervals of five percent, ranging from a far-left interval for districts where the Democratic presidential percentage was 0–4.9 to a far-right interval where the percentage was 95–100. Thus the 1956 graph shows that the Stevenson-Kefauver ticket won 50 to 54.9 percent of the major-party vote in about 7 percent of the districts (actual district N = 30) and a modal 40 to 44.9 percent of the vote in about 20 percent of the districts (actual N = 87).

In themselves these presidential graphs hold no surprises; they are presented for the purpose of visual comparison with the other data. The presidential mode travels well to the left of the 50 percent mark in 1956 and well to the right in 1964, but the four distributions are fundamentally alike in shape—highly peaked, unimodal, not far from normal.

The center and left columns give frequency distributions, organized on the same principles as the four presidential graphs, in which House districts are sorted according to percentages of the major-party House vote cast in them in each of the nine congressional elections in the years 1956–1972. But for each House election there are two graphs side by side. For each year the graph in the left column gives a distribution of returns for

6. At the time of writing no comparable figures were yet available for the 1972 election. Dealing with the 1968 returns by calculating percentages of the major-party vote poses obvious problems—especially in the South—but so does any alternative way of dealing with them. Congressional district data used in Figure 1 and following tables and figures were taken from *Congressional Quarterly* compilations.

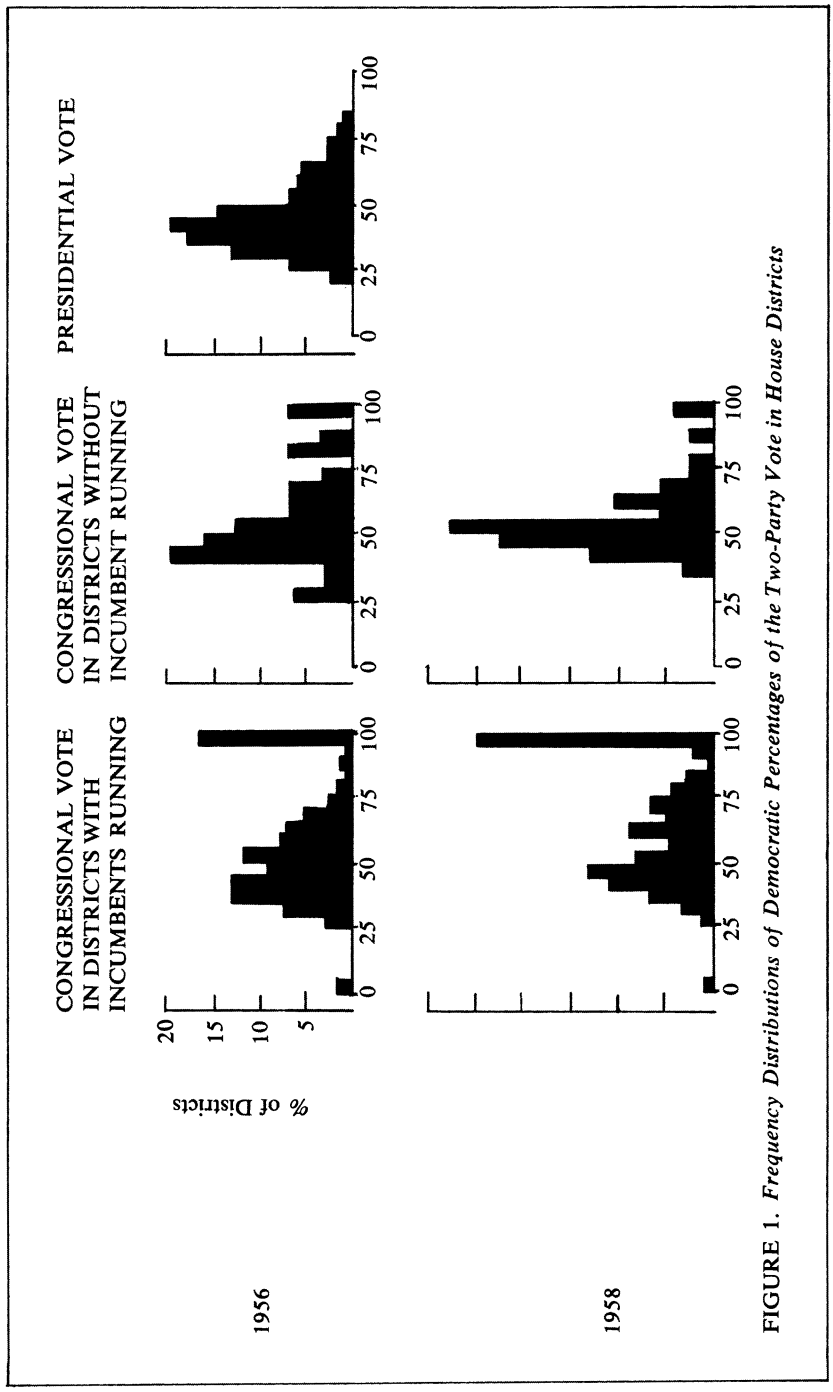
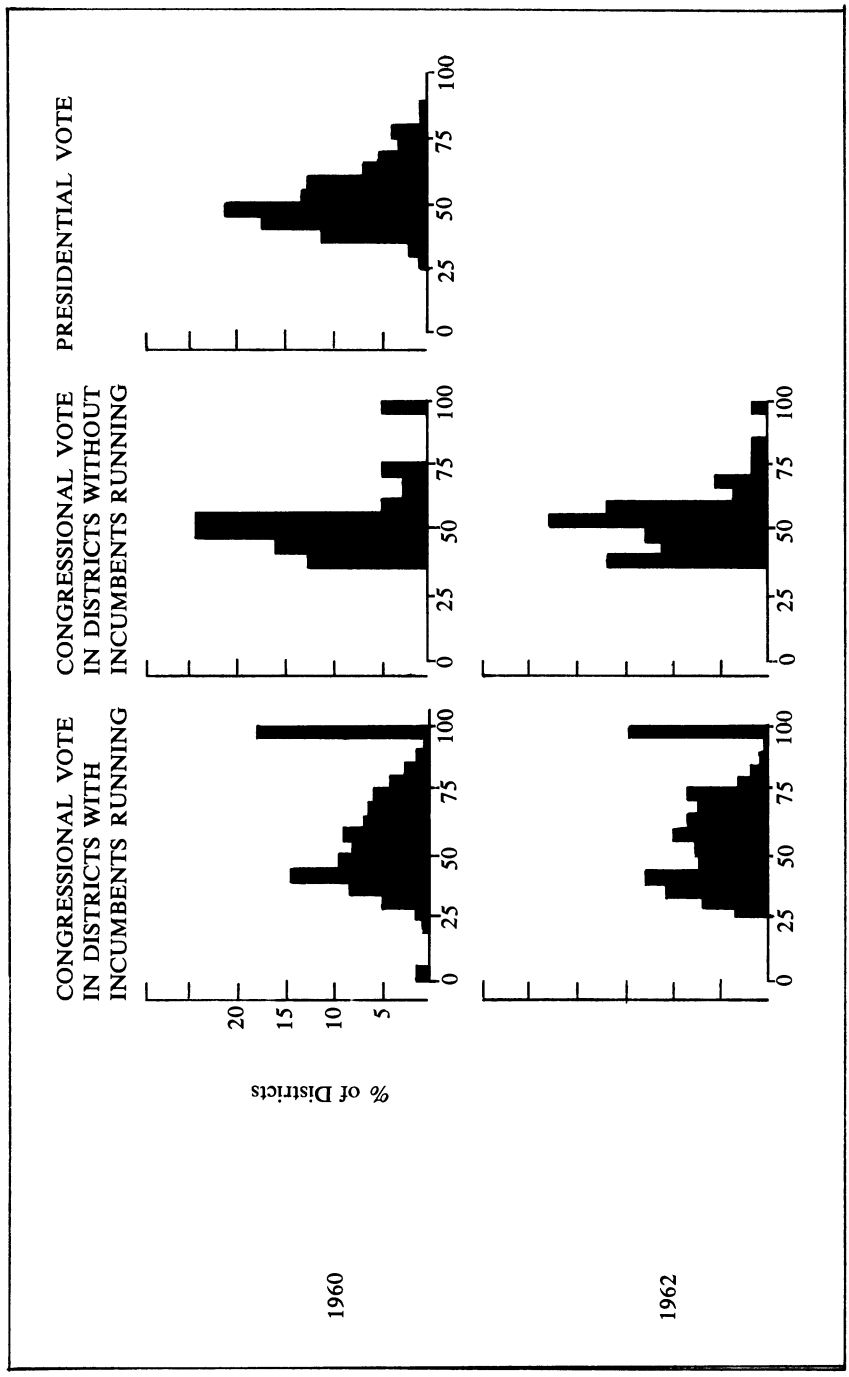
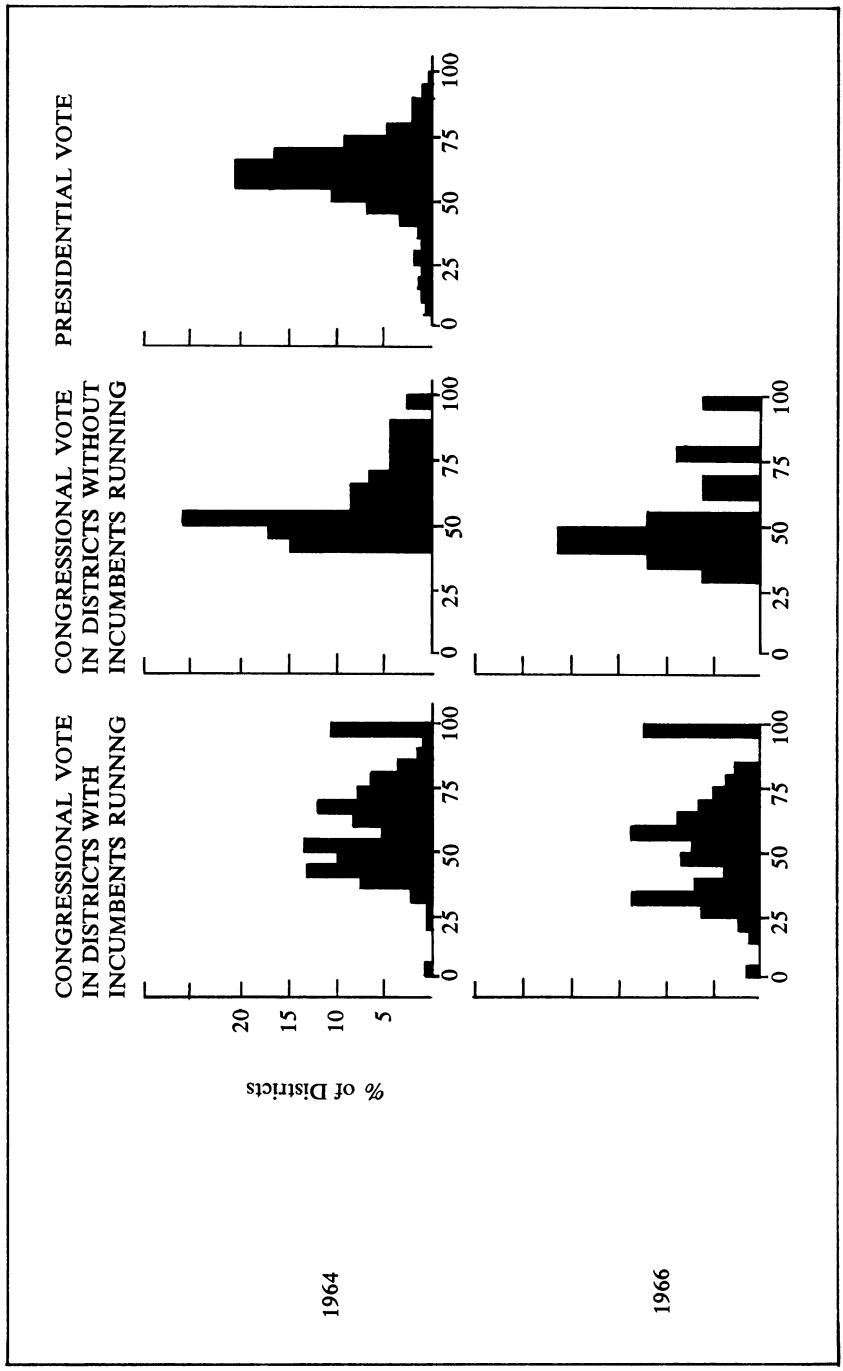
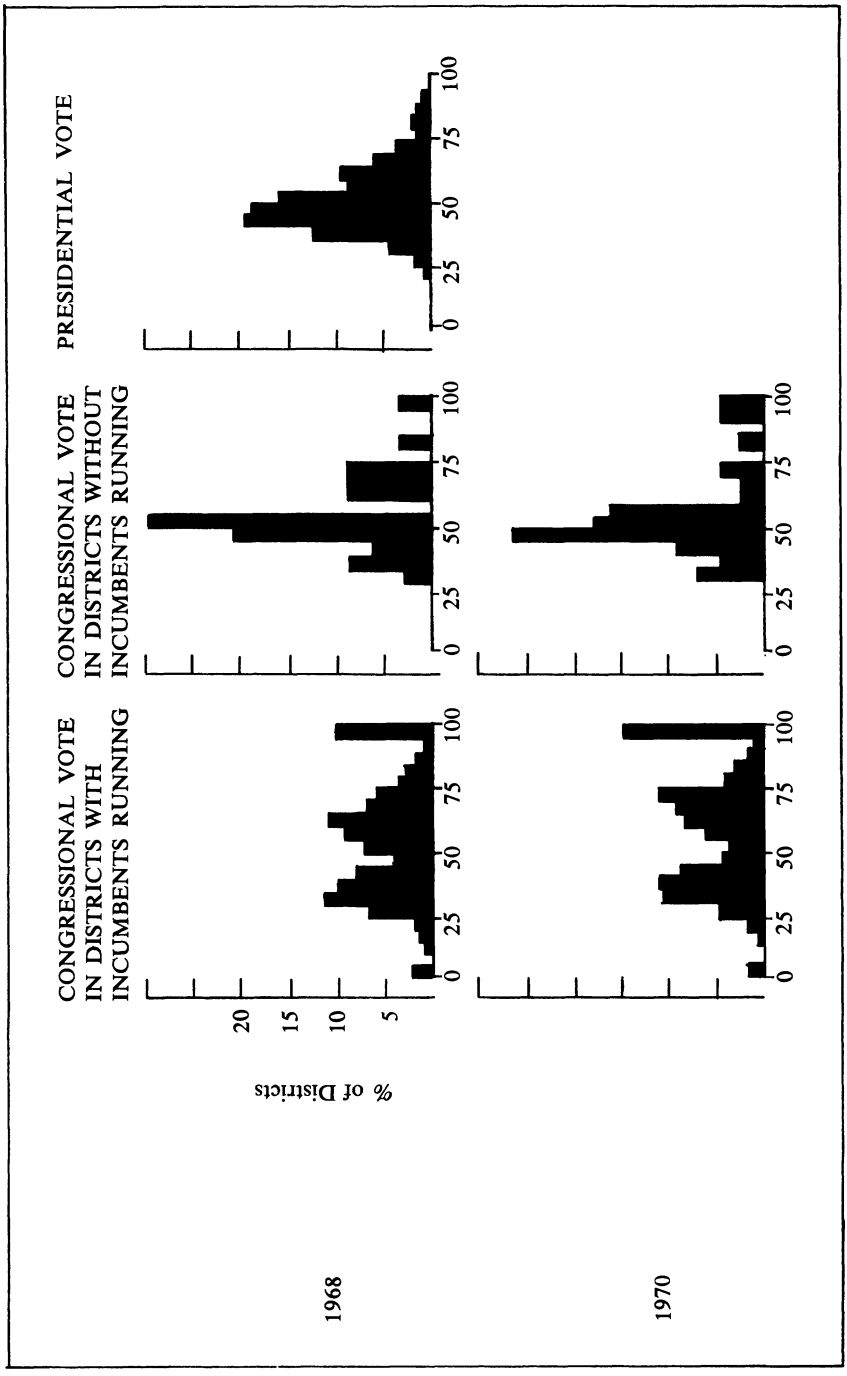
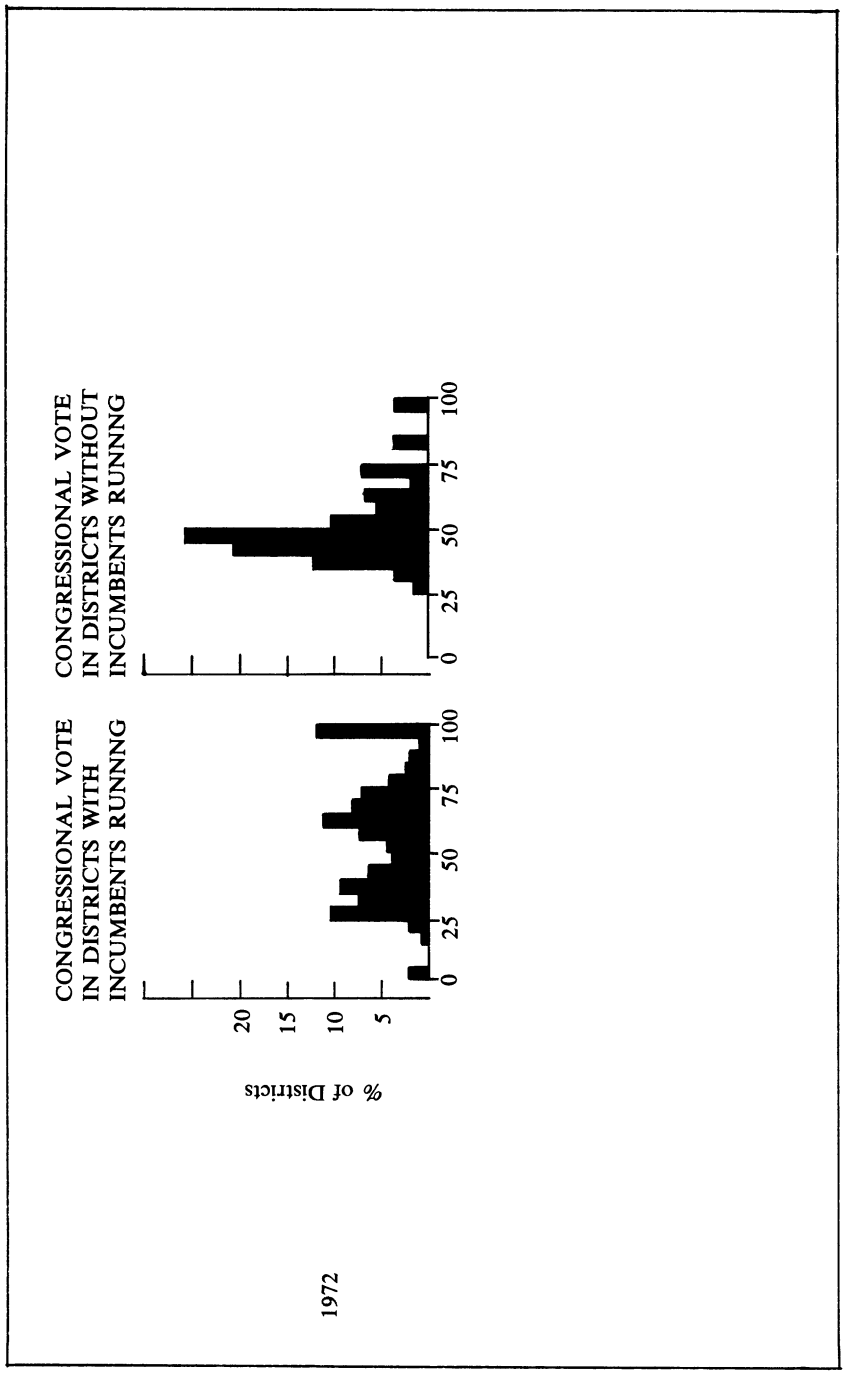


FIGURE 1. *Frequency Distributions of Democratic Percentages of the Two-Party Vote in House Districts*









all districts in which an incumbent congressman was running, the center column a set of returns for districts with no incumbents running.[7]

The center graphs, the "open seat" distributions, are erratically shaped because the N's are small. The number of House districts without incumbents running averages 43 (about a tenth of the membership) and ranges from 31 (in 1956) to 59 (in 1972); there is no discernible upward or downward trend in the series. With allowances made for erratic shape these nine "open seat" distributions are much alike. All are highly peaked and centrally clustered. In 1958 and 1968 nearly 30 percent of the readings appear in the modal interval (in both cases the 50–54.9 percent Democratic interval). Over the set of nine elections the proportion of "open seat" outcomes falling in the 40–59.9 percent area ranges from 54.8 percent to 70.2 percent, the proportion in the 45–54.9 percent area from 29.0 percent to 50.1 percent. All of which imparts the simple and obvious message that House elections without incumbents running tend to be closely contested.

The nine graphs in the left-hand column give distributions for districts with incumbents running.[8] Thus in 1956 about 9 percent of districts with incumbents running yielded returns in the 45–49.9 percent Democratic interval. In some of these cases the incumbents were Democrats who thereby lost their seats; in any of these nine graphs the election reading for a losing incumbent will appear on what was, from his standpoint, the unfortunate side of the 50 percent line. In an Appendix the nine data sets are disaggregated to show where in fact incumbents lost.

Immediately visible on each of these incumbency graphs is the isolated mode in the 95–100 percent interval, recording the familiar phenomenon of uncontested Democratic victories—mostly in the South. But, if these right-flush modes can be ignored for a moment, what has recently been happening in the contested range is far more interesting. In 1956 and 1960 the distributions in the contested range are skewed a little to the right, but still not far from normal in shape. In the 1958 and 1962 midterm years the distributions are somewhat flatter and more jagged.[9] In

7. An incumbent is defined here as a congressman who held a seat at the time he was running in a November election, even if he had first taken the seat in a recent by-election.

8. The center graphs cover districts with no incumbents, the left-hand graphs districts with one incumbent. This leaves no place in the diagram for districts with two opposite-party incumbents running against each other. There were 16 of these throw-in cases over the period: 7 in 1962, 1 in 1966, 4 in 1968, 1 in 1970, 3 in 1972. Republicans won in 10 of them.

9. On balance it can be expected that distributions will be more centrally clustered in presidential than in midterm years, for the reason that presidential elections enroll expanded electorates in which disproportionate numbers of voters violate

1964 and 1966 they appear only tenuously normal. In 1968, 1970, and 1972 they have become emphatically bimodal in shape. Or, to ring in the uncontested Democratic seats again, the shape of incumbency distributions has now become strikingly trimodal. Thus in the 1972 election there was a range of reasonably safe Republican seats (with the 25–29.9 percent and 35–39.5 percent intervals most heavily populated), a range of reasonably safe Democratic seats (peaked in the 60–64.9 percent interval), and a set of 44 uncontested Democratic seats.

The title of this paper includes the phrase, "The Case of the Vanishing Marginals." The "vanishing marginals" are all those congressmen whose election percentages could, but now do not, earn them places in the central range of these incumbency distributions. In the graphs for the most recent elections the trough between the "reasonably safe" Republican and Democratic modes appears in the percentage range that we are accustomed to calling "marginal." Figure 2 captures the point, with time series showing how many incumbent congressmen have recorded percentages in the "marginal" range in each election from 1956 through 1972.[10] The lower series on the two Figure 2 graphs show, for comparative purposes, the number of "open seat" outcomes in the marginal range. In one graph marginality is defined narrowly (45–54.9 Democratic percentage of the major-party vote), in the other broadly (40–59.9 percent). By either definition the number of incumbents running in the marginal zone has roughly halved over the sixteen-year period.[11] For some reason, or reasons, it seems to be a lot easier now than it used to be for a sitting congressmen to win three-fifths of the November vote.

II.

Why the decline in incumbent marginality? No clear answer is available.[12] Adding complexity to the problem is the fact that the proportion of House

district partisan habits in their congressional voting. See Harvey Kabaker, "Estimating the Normal Vote in Congressional Elections," *Midwest Journal of Political Science,* 13 (1969), 58–83.

10. Again, the 16 throw-in cases are not included. It should be recalled here that some of these incumbents in the marginal range moved across the 50 percent mark and lost their seats. (See the Appendix.) Of the 198 incumbents who lost elections to opposite-party challengers in the 1956–1972 period, only 4 plummeted far enough to fall outside the broadly defined (40–59.9 percent) marginal range.

11. The decline has come in spite of Republican inroads in Southern House districts. One reason here is that, once they have gotten their seats, Southern Republican incumbents tend to win elections handily; 16 of 22 of them won with over 60 percent of the major-party vote in 1970, 18 of 22 in 1972.

12. Albert D. Cover is conducting research at Yale on incumbency and marginality in the 1960's.

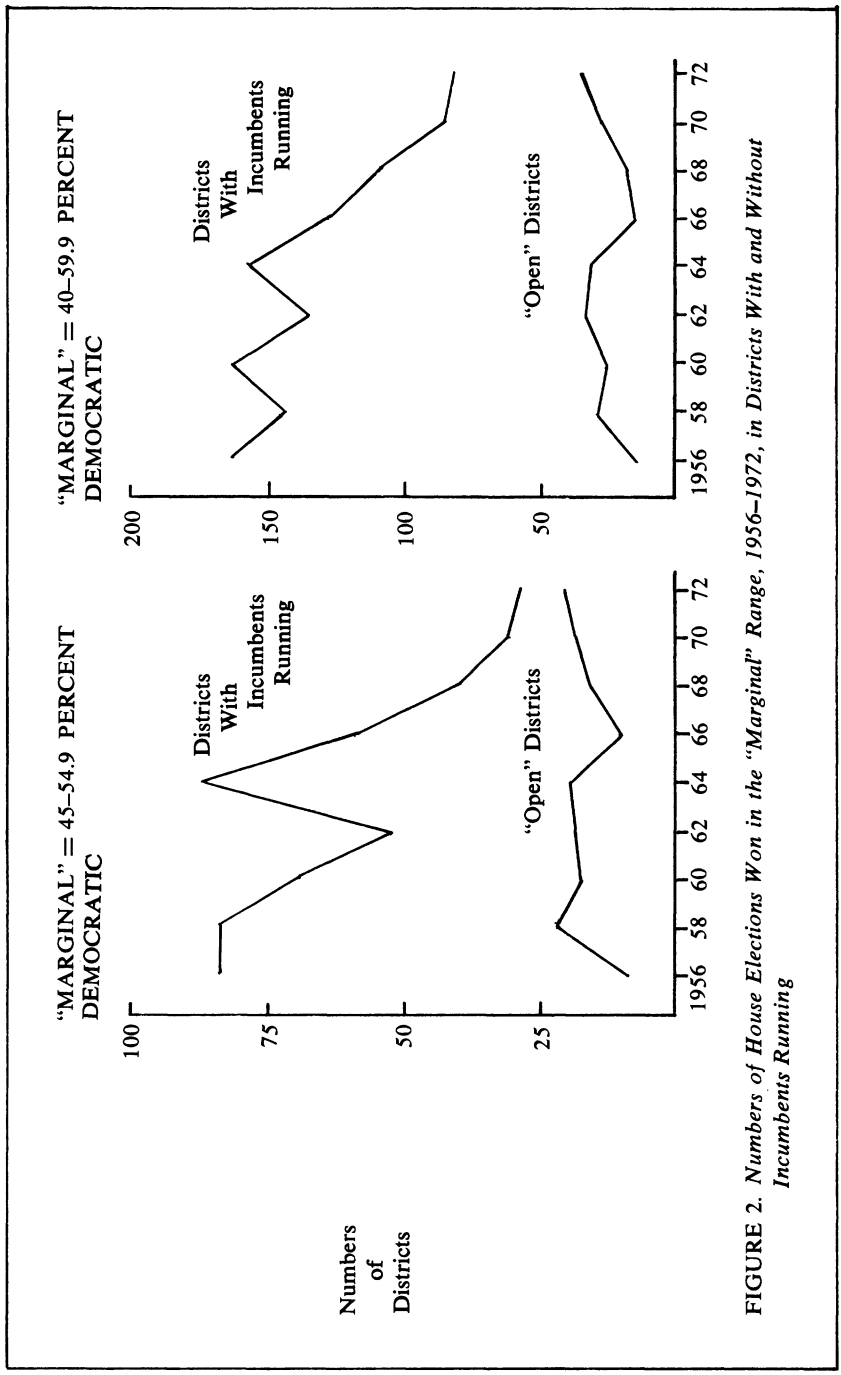


FIGURE 2. *Numbers of House Elections Won in the "Marginal" Range, 1956–1972, in Districts With and Without Incumbents Running*

seats won in the marginal range has been slowly declining for over a century.[13] Whatever mix of causes underlies the long-run change could account for much of the rapid current change as well. On the assumption that the contemporary decline is not ephemeral, perhaps the most useful thing to do here is to set out some hypotheses which may singly or in combination account for it. Five hypotheses are offered below. Some have a more persuasive ring than others; none is wholly implausible. The first has to do with district line-drawing, the next three with congressmen's actions designed to attract votes, the last with voter behavior not inspired by congressmen's actions.

(1) The line-drawing explanation is easy to reach for. In the last decade of chronic redistricting the possibility of building districts to profit incumbents has not been lost on House members or others acting in their interest. With county lines less sacred than they once were, ingenious districts can be and have been drawn. And there are good examples of cross-party districting deals among congressmen of large state delegations.[14] But the problem with the line-drawing hypothesis is that it seems not to explain very much. Manipulation of the aggregate national data does not yield an impressive relation between redistricting and electoral benefit.[15] Moreover, if voters are being partitioned into safe House districts it can be argued that bimodal patterns ought to appear sooner or later in presidential and "open seat" distributions of the sort displayed in Figure 1. Of bimodalism the relevant Figure 1 graphs give no trace, although it must be said that the evidence is inconclusive. The evidence on redistricting generally is incomplete and inconclusive. But the odds are that it will not explain very much. If all 435 congressmen were suddenly to retire in 1974, and if elections to replace them were conducted in the 1972 district set, the odds are that a distribution of new member percentages would look like a presidential or an evened out "open seat" distribution—unimodal and roughly normal, though perhaps still with a modest isolated mode for uncontested Southerners.

The next four hypotheses hinge on the assumption that House incum-

13. I owe this point to Walter D. Burnham. On long-run decline in House turnover see Charles O. Jones, "Inter-Party Competition for Congressional Seats," *Western Political Quarterly*, 17 (1964), 461–476.

14. Some strategies and examples are discussed in David R. Mayhew, "Congressional Representation: Theory and Practice in Drawing the Districts," ch. 7 in Nelson W. Polsby, ed., *Reapportionment in the 1970's* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 274–284.

15. On the 1966 election see Robert J. Erikson, "Malapportionment, Gerrymandering, and Party Fortunes in Congressional Elections," *American Political Science Review*, 66 (1972), 1238.

bency now carries with it greater electoral advantages than it has in the past. There is evidence that it does.[16] One way to try to find out is to look at what happens to party fortunes in districts where congressmen die, retire, or lose primaries—to compare the last November percentages of veteran incumbents with the percentages of their successor nominees. Table I does this for the six elections in the years 1962–1972. Figures are given for transitions in which the retirees were at least two-term veterans and where the bracketing elections were both contested by both parties. It is hard to tease conclusions out of these data; the universes for the six elections are small, the districts in each inter-election set vary widely in their change percentages, national trends affect Democrats and Republicans differently, and there is the redistricting problem throughout. But these are all of the data there are on the point. Most of the columns in the table include figures on districts with line changes. Including these raises the obvious problem that redistricting itself can affect party percentages. But there is some justification for the inclusion. For one thing, no systematic difference appears here between what happens electorally in redrawn and untouched districts. For another, it is impossible to get any reading at all on the 1972 election without inspecting the redrawn districts; 25 of the 27 "succession nominations" occurred in 1972 in districts with line changes. If handled carefully the altered districts can yield information. Redrawn districts are covered here if they were treated in the press as being more or less "the same" as districts preceding them; thus, for example, Paul Cronin is commonly regarded as Bradford Morse's successor in the fifth Massachusetts district although Cronin's 1972 boundaries are somewhat different from Morse's old ones.

What to look for in Table I is whether switches in party nominees bring about drops in party percentages. The bigger the drop the higher the putative value of incumbency. Inter-election changes in party percentage are calculated here by comparing party shares of the total congressional district vote in the bracketing elections.[17] The first three columns in the table give data only on districts without line changes. Thus in 1962 there were four Democratic retirements (or deaths, etc.) in districts with 1960 lines intact; the Democratic share of the total vote fell an average of 5.2 percent

16. Robert Erikson estimates that incumbency status was worth about 2 percent of the vote in the 1950's and early 1960's, but about 5 percent in 1966 and thereafter. Erikson, "The Advantage of Incumbency in Congressional Elections," *Polity*, 3 (1971), 395–405. Erikson, "Malapportionment, Gerrymandering, and Party Fortunes in Congressional Elections," op. cit., 1240.

17. Figures 1 and 2 are built on candidate percentage of the major-party vote, Table I on percentages of the total vote.

Table I Change in Party Percentage in House Districts Where Incumbents Have Retired, Died, or Lost Primaries

	TRANSITIONS IN DISTRICTS WITHOUT LINE CHANGES						TRANSITIONS IN DISTRICTS WITH LINE CHANGES	
	Democratic Districts		*Republican Districts*		*All Districts*		*All Districts*	
	N	MEAN	N	MEAN	N	MEAN	N	MEAN
1962	(4)	−5.2	(4)	−0.2	(8)	−2.7	(9)	+1.3
1964	(12)	+5.5	(13)	−8.2	(25)	−1.6		*
1966	(3)	−6.2	(3)	−2.5	(6)	−4.3	(7)	−7.7
1968	(4)	+1.1	(3)	−14.9	(7)	−5.8	(12)	−8.6
1970	(15)	−4.9	(17)	−7.9	(32)	−6.5	(4)	−5.7
1972	(2)	−26.7		*	(2)	−26.7	(25)	−9.5

TRANSITIONS IN DISTRICTS WITH AND WITHOUT LINE CHANGES

	Democratic Districts		*Republican Districts*		*All Districts*		*All Districts*		*All Districts*	
	N	MEAN	N	MEAN	N	MEAN	N	WGHTD MEAN	N	MEDIAN
1962	(5)	−6.0	(12)	+1.8	(17)	−0.5	(17)	−2.1	(17)	−3.1
1964	(12)	+5.5	(13)	−8.2	(25)	−1.6	(25)	−1.3	(25)	−3.1
1966	(8)	−8.9	(5)	−1.8	(13)	−6.2	(13)	−5.4	(13)	−8.2
1968	(10)	−1.4	(9)	−14.5	(19)	−7.6	(19)	−8.0	(19)	−4.7
1970	(19)	−5.1	(17)	−7.9	(36)	−6.4	(36)	−6.0	(36)	−5.6
1972	(12)	−13.1	(15)	−9.0	(27)	−10.8	(27)	−11.1	(27)	−10.2

in these four districts between 1960 and 1962. In the four Republican retirement districts in 1962 the Republican share of the total vote fell an average of 0.2 percent. In 1964 there was an understandable party gain in the Democratic retirement districts, and an especially heavy mean loss in the Republican set. Fortuitously the numbers of retirement districts for the two parties are almost identical in each of the five elections in 1962 through 1970, so it makes sense to calculate mean change values for all retirement districts regardless of party in each year in order to try to cancel out the effects of election-specific national trends. This is done in the third column, a list of cross-party percentage change means for the six elections. (Thus in 1964 the average change in the 25 retirement seats was a negative 1.6 percent even though the average party values were far apart; Republicans generally lost more in their transitions than Democrats gained in theirs.) Here there emerges some fairly solid evidence. Mean drops in percentage were higher in 1966, 1968, and 1970 than in 1962 and 1964. (1972, with its N of 2, can be ignored.) The best evidence is for 1964 and 1970, with their large N's. Loss of incumbents cost the parties a mean of 1.6 percent in 1964, a mean of 6.5 percent in 1970.

In the fourth column figures on transitions in redrawn districts are introduced. The values are mean changes for redrawn retirement districts by year regardless of party. It will be seen that these values differ in no systematic way from the values for undisturbed districts in the third column. There is the same general trend toward bigger drops in percentage. Especially striking is the 1972 value of minus 9.5 percent, lower than any other reading in the list of values for redrawn districts. The fifth, sixth, and seventh columns of the table give mean values by year, respectively, for Democratic, Republican, and all retirement districts, with no distinctions being made between altered and unaltered districts. The eighth column gives a weighted mean for each year, a simple average of the party averages. Finally the ninth column gives a median value for the set of all readings in each year.

These readings, tenuous as they are, all point in the same direction. Incumbency does seem to have increased in electoral value, and it is reasonable to suppose that one effect of this increase has been to boost House members of both parties out of the marginal electoral range. If incumbency has risen in value, what accounts for the rise? The second, third, and fourth hypotheses below focus on electorally useful activities that House members may now be engaging in more effectively than their predecessors did ten or twenty years ago.

(2) House members may now be advertising themselves better. Simple name recognition counts for a lot in House elections, as the Survey Re-

search Center data show.[18] A name perceived with a halo of good will around it probably counts for more. If House members have not profited from accelerated advertising in the last decade, it is not from want of trying. The time series in Figure 3 shows, in millions of pieces, how much mail was sent out from the Capitol (by both House and Senate members) in each year from 1954 through 1970.[19] The mail includes letters, newsletters, questionnaires, child-care pamphlets, etc., some of them mailed to all district box-holders. Peak mailing months are the Octobers of even-numbered years. Mail flow more than sextupled over the sixteen-year period, with an especially steep increase between 1965 and 1966. In fact the mail-flow curve matches well any incumbency-advantage curve derivable from the data in Table I. There is no let-up in sight; one recent estimate has it that House members will send out about 900,000 pieces of mail per member in 1974, at a total public cost of $38.1 million.[20] So the answer to the incumbency advantage question could be a remarkably simple one: the more hundreds of thousands of messages congressmen rain down on constituents the more votes they get. Whether all this activity has significantly raised the proportion of citizens who know their congressmen's names is uncertain. There are some Gallup readings showing that the share of adults who could name their congressmen rose from 46 to 53 percent between 1966 and 1970.[21]

(3) Another possibility is that House members may be getting more political mileage out of federal programs. The number of grant-in-aid programs has risen in the last decade at something like the rate of Capitol mail flow. The more programs there are, the more chances House members have to claim credit ostentatiously for the local manifestations of them—housing grants, education grants, anti-pollution grants, etc.

(4) Yet another possibility is that House members have become more skilled at public position-taking on "issues." The point is a technological one. If more congressmen are commissioning and using scientific opinion polls to plumb district sentiment, then House members may have become, on balance, more practiced at attuning themselves to district opinion.[22]

18. Donald E. Stokes and Warren E. Miller, "Party Government and the Saliency of Congress," ch. 11 in Angus Campbell, et al., *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley, 1966), pp. 204–209.

19. Data supplied by Albert D. Cover.

20. Norman C. Miller, "Yes, You Are Getting More Politico Mail; And It Will Get Worse," *Wall Street Journal,* March 6, 1973.

21. Gallup survey in *Washington Post,* September 20, 1970.

22. There is a discussion of roll-call position-taking and its electoral effects in Robert Erikson, "The Electoral Impact of Congressional Roll Call Voting," *American Political Science Review,* 65 (1971), 1018–1032.

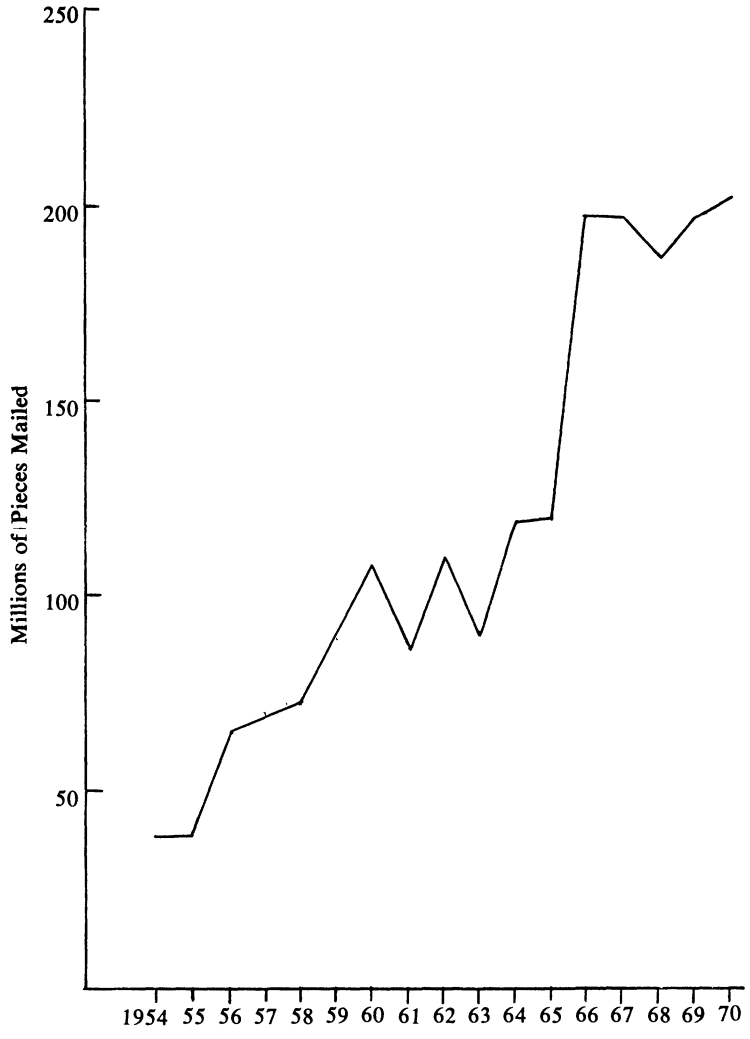


FIGURE 3 *Franked Mail Sent out by House and Senate Members, in Millions of Pieces, 1954–1970*

SOURCE: U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Legislative Branch Appropriations for 1970,* 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969, p. 501 has 1954–1968 data. Subsequent annual hearings update estimated franking use.

There is a possibility here, however hard it is to try to measure. There may be a greater general sophistication today about polling and its uses. In 1964, forty-nine Republican House members running for re-election signed a pre-convention statement endorsing Senator Goldwater. It was claimed that Goldwater's nomination would help the party ticket. The forty-nine suffered disproportionately in November. [23] In 1972 there was no comparable rush among House Democrats to identify themselves with Senator McGovern.

(5) The fifth and last hypothesis has to do with changes in voter behavior not inspired by changes in incumbent activities. It is possible that incumbents have been profiting not from any exertions of their own but from changes in voter attitudes. A logic suggests itself. Voters dissatisfied with party cues could be reaching for any other cues that are available in deciding how to vote. The incumbency cue is readily at hand. This hypothesis assumes a current rise in discontent with parties; it assumes nothing about changes in the cues voters have been receiving from congressmen.

There is no point in speculating further here about causes. But it is important that the subject be given further treatment, if for no other reason than that some of the variables can be legally manipulated. The congressional franking privilege comes first to mind.

III.

If fewer House members are winning elections narrowly, and if the proportion of "open seats" per election is not rising, it ought to follow that congressional seat swings are declining in amplitude. The argument requires no assumption that national swings in the House popular vote are changing in amplitude—and indeed there is no evidence in the contemporary data that they are. It does require the assumption that a congressman's percentage showing in one election supplies information on his strength as he goes into the next. That is, a House member running at the 60 percent level is less likely to be unseated by an adverse 5 percent party trend next time around than one running at the 54 percent level. It is easy to predict that a popular voting trend will cut less of a swath through a set of congressmen whose last-election percentages are arrayed like those in the 1968, 1970, and 1972 incumbency graphs of Figure 1 than through a set whose percentages are centrally and normally distributed.

There is evidence suggesting that the flight from marginality is having

23. Robert A. Schoenberger, "Campaign Strategy and Party Loyalty: the Electoral Relevance of Candidate Decision-Making in the 1964 Congressional Elections," *American Political Science Review*, 63 (1969), 515–520.

its posited effect. Edward Tufte has found that a "swing ratio"—a rate of translation of votes into seats—built on data from the 1966, 1968, and 1970 elections yields an exceptionally low value when compared with ratios for other election triplets over the last century.[24] The figures in Table II point in the same direction. Supplied here are data on popular vote swings, net partisan seat swings, and incumbency defeats for each and both parties in the election years from 1956 through 1972.[25] It is worth noting that the large seat swings of 1958, 1964, and 1966 were heavily dependent upon defeats of incumbents. Very few incumbents have lost since 1966. (Almost all the 1972 losers were victims of line changes.) Especially interesting are the figures for 1970, a year in which the popular vote swing was a fairly sizable 3.3 percent. Yet only nine incumbents of the disfavored party lost and the net swing over 1968 was only twelve—of which three changed over in 1969 by-elections. Part of the explanation here is doubtless that the disfavored party had relatively few incumbents in the vulnerable range to protect. Only 47 Republicans running in 1970 had won under the 60 percent mark in 1968, whereas there had been 82 comparably exposed Republicans running in 1958, 76 Republicans in 1964, and 79 Democrats in 1966.

What general conclusions can be drawn? If the trends hold we are witnesses to the blunting of a blunt instrument. It may be too soon to say that seat swings of the 1958 or 1964 variety can be consigned to the history books, but it is hard to see how they could be equaled in the newer electoral circumstances. There is probably another manifestation here of what Walter Dean Burnham calls "electoral disaggregation"—a weakening of the peculiar links that party has supplied between electorate and government.[26] There is a concomitant triumph for the Madisonian vision; a Congress less affected by electoral tides is, on balance, one less sus-

24. Op. cit., pp. 549–550.

25. The incumbency defeat figures cover only losses to opposite-party challengers. Thus once again the 16 throw-in cases are disregarded. Also ignored are the November losses of two highly visible Democrats—Brooks Hays (1958) and Louise Day Hicks (1972)—to independents who thereupon enrolled as Democrats themselves in Washington. It might be added here that some incumbents do after all lose their primaries. The figures for losses to primary challengers are: 6 in 1956, 4 in 1958, 5 in 1960, 8 in 1962, 5 in 1964, 5 in 1966, 3 in 1968, 9 in 1970, 8 in 1972. The figures for losses where redistricting has thrown incumbents into the same primary: 5 in 1962, 3 in 1964, 3 in 1966, 1 in 1968, 1 in 1970, 6 in 1972. Whatever their qualitative effects, primaries have not rivaled the larger November swings in turnover leverage.

26. "The End of American Party Politics," *Trans-Action*, 7 (December, 1969), 18–20.

ceptible to presidential wiles. But there is a long-run danger that a Congress that cannot supply quick electoral change is no match for a presidency than can.

Table II House Vote Swings and Seat Swings, 1956–1972

	CHANGE IN NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE OVER LAST ELECTION	NET PARTISAN SEAT SWING OVER LAST ELECTION	INCUMBENT LOSSES TO OPPOSITE PARTY CHALLENGERS		
			D	*R*	*Total*
1956	1.5% D	2 D	8	7	15
1958	5.1% D	49 D	1	34	35
1960	1.1% R	20 R	22	3	25
1962	2.2% R	2 R	9	5	14
1964	4.7% D	36 D	5	39	44
1966	6.2% R	47 R	39	1	40
1968	0.4% R	5 R	5	0	5
1970	3.3% D	12 D	2	9	11
1972	1.4% R	12 R	6	3	9

Appendix

The columns of figures below are frequency distributions of Democratic percentages of the November two-party House vote recorded in districts with incumbents of either (but not both) of the parties running, in biennial elections from 1956 through 1972, with separate columns for each year for districts harboring Democratic and Republican incumbents. Thus in 1956 there were twenty-eight districts with Republican incumbents running in which Democratic percentages were in the 45–49.9 percent range. There were also eight districts with Democratic incumbents running in which Democratic percentages were in the 45–49.9 percent range; these eight Democrats thereby lost their seats. Squares or rectanges are drawn around cells below which contain values for incumbents who lost seats to opposite-party challengers.

Democratic % of the Two-Party Vote	*Numbers of Districts, by Year and by Party of Incumbent*																	
	1956		*1958*		*1960*		*1962*		*1964*		*1966*		*1968*		*1970*		*1972*	
	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R
0- 4.9		3		1		3		1		1		4		9		5		7
5- 9.9																		
10- 14.9														1				
15- 19.9												3		3		2		2
20- 24.9						1				1		8		6		5		7
25- 29.9		13		1		3		11		1		24		25		15		38
30- 34.9		28		11		16		24		7		53		47		40		27
35- 39.9		54		27		33		39	2	25	1	26		39		41		36
40- 44.9		54		44	3	56	2	45	2	47	8	6		31		34	2	22
45- 49.9	8	28	1	50	19	19	7	19	1	38	30	3	5	10	2	15	4	10

	1956		1958		1960		1962		1964		1966		1968		1970		1972	
	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R
50- 54.9	40	6	4	27	28	3	23	4	14	35	28		26		8	7	15	2
55- 59.9	28	1	11	7	36		36	1	18	4	53	1	38		20	1	27	1
60- 64.9	28		33		27		32		35		34		43		28	1	40	
65- 69.9	21		19		26		27		45		26		24		35		30	
70- 74.9	10		26		21		31		29		20		22		42		26	
75- 79.9	7		17		16		11		24		13		12		15		16	
80- 84.9	2		10		11		4		13		9		10		12		9	
85- 89.9	4		1		4		2		4				4		4		7	
90- 94.9	1		5		3		1		2				1		1		1	
95-100.0	68		95		72		56		40		51		41		56		44	