

Chapter

3

Congressional Candidates

Each state or congressional district is a unique electoral arena. Diversity among constituencies underlies the astonishing variety of political forces operating in congressional politics. When attention is shifted to particular states or districts, however, as it is when we examine congressional candidates and campaigns—the subjects of this and the next chapter—the local context becomes a constant rather than a variable factor. Its elements are fixed, at least for the short run. Electoral variation originates elsewhere, in changing political conditions and issues, and in the skills, resources, and strategies of candidates and other participants in electoral politics.

INCUMBENCY FACTOR

From the 1950s through the 1980s, the electoral importance of individual candidates and campaigns expanded, while that of party labels and national issues diminished. The emergence of a more candidate-centered electoral process helped one class of congressional candidates to prosper: The incumbent office-holders. Indeed, the electoral advantage enjoyed by incumbents, at least as measured by electoral margins, increased so notably after the mid-1960s that it became the main focus of congressional electoral research for the next quarter century. This research leaves little doubt that incumbency confers major electoral benefits, but it also reveals that these benefits are neither automatic, nor certain, nor constant across electoral contexts. Even during the 1970s and 1980s, when House incumbents were riding their highest, impressive reelection rates and expanded electoral margins seemed ever more dearly bought. The pursuit of reelection absorbed a great deal of time, energy, and money, reflecting members' enduring

sense of electoral uncertainty and risk. The electoral upheavals of the early 1990s showed that their worry was not misplaced; the advantages of incumbency are far more contingent than the surface evidence might have suggested.

Nonetheless, incumbency stands out as a conspicuous factor in congressional elections from almost any perspective. Most obviously, incumbency is a dominant consideration because incumbents are so consistently successful at winning elections, and everyone involved in politics knows it. At a deeper level, nearly everything pertaining to candidates and campaigns for Congress is profoundly influenced by whether the candidate is an incumbent, challenging an incumbent, or pursuing an open seat. An understanding of why—and how—modern incumbents have usually done so well is central to comprehending the strengths and weaknesses of the House as an institution.

The basic picture seems clear enough. The data in Table 3.1 show just how thoroughly incumbents have dominated postwar House elections. Typically, more than 90 percent of the races include incumbents, and more than 90 percent of them win. On the average, fewer than 2 percent of officeholders are defeated in primary elections, and fewer than 7 percent lose general elections. Even in years very unfavorable to one of the parties, a large majority of its House incumbents return. In 1994, the Democrats' worst year since 1946, 84 percent of the House Democrats who sought reelection won. In 1974, a notoriously bad year for Republicans, 77 percent of the Republican incumbents who ran were returned to office.

The story is rather different for Senate incumbents. Though the odds still favor them, senators have not been as consistently successful at winning reelection as have representatives. On average, 77 percent have won reelection during the postwar period; 5 percent lost primaries, 18 percent lost general elections. Moreover, their electoral fortunes fluctuate much more widely from year to year. In 1980, for example, only 55 percent of the incumbent Senate candidates won reelection. In 1986, more incumbent senators than representatives were defeated, even though 14 times as many of the latter were running. Yet in 1982, 1990, and 1994, Senate incumbents were more difficult to defeat than House incumbents. This is only the first of many instances of greater variability to be observed among Senate elections.

Figure 3.1 displays graphically the fluctuations in the success rates of House and Senate incumbents in elections from 1946 through 1994. The sharp swings in the fortunes of Senate incumbents are clearly visible. House incumbents were much more vulnerable in 1946 and 1948 than in later elections; after 1948, the data show no statistically significant trend, although the high rates of success sustained in elections from 1984 through 1990 do stand out visually.¹

From 1950 through 1994, the reelection prospects of House incumbents remained, despite considerable year-to-year variation, unchanged. This is curious, because by other measures, incumbent electoral performance improved dramatically over these years.

The most straightforward measure—the mean percentage of the two-party vote won by incumbent House candidates in contested elections from 1946 through 1990—is displayed in Figure 3.2. The average incumbent's vote share rose dramatically from the late 1940s to the late 1980s, from about 60 percent to about

Table 3.1 REELECTION RATES OF HOUSE AND SENATE INCUMBENTS, 1946-1994

Year	Seeking Reelection	Defeated in Primaries	Defeated in General Election	Percentage Reelected
House				
1946	398	18	52	82
1948	400	15	68	79
1950	400	6	32	91
1952	389	9	26	91
1954	407	6	22	93
1956	411	6	16	95
1958	396	3	37	90
1960	405	5	25	93
1962	402	12	22	92
1964	397	8	45	87
1966	411	8	41	88
1968	409	4	9	97
1970	401	10	12	95
1972	390	12	13	94
1974	391	8	40	88
1976	384	3	13	96
1978	382	5	19	94
1980	398	6	31	91
1982	393	10	29	90
1984	409	3	16	95
1986	393	2	6	98
1988	408	1	6	98
1990	406	1	15	96
1992	368	19	24	88
1994	387	4	34	90
Senate				
1946	30	6	7	57
1948	25	2	8	60
1950	32	5	5	69
1952	31	2	9	65
1954	32	2	6	75
1956	29	0	4	86
1958	28	0	10	64
1960	29	0	1	97
1962	35	1	5	83
1964	33	1	4	85
1966	32	3	1	88
1968	28	4	4	71
1970	31	1	6	77
1972	27	2	5	74
1974	27	2	2	85
1976	25	0	9	64
1978	25	3	7	60

(continued)

Table 3.1 (CONTINUED)

Year	Seeking Reelection	Defeated in Primaries	Defeated in General Election	Percentage Reelected
1980	29	4	9	55
1982	30	0	2	93
1984	29	0	3	90
1986	28	0	7	75
1988	27	0	4	85
1990	32	0	1	97
1992	28	1	4	82
1994	26	0	2	92

Source: Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics on Congress 1995-1996* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1995), tables 2-7 and 2-8.

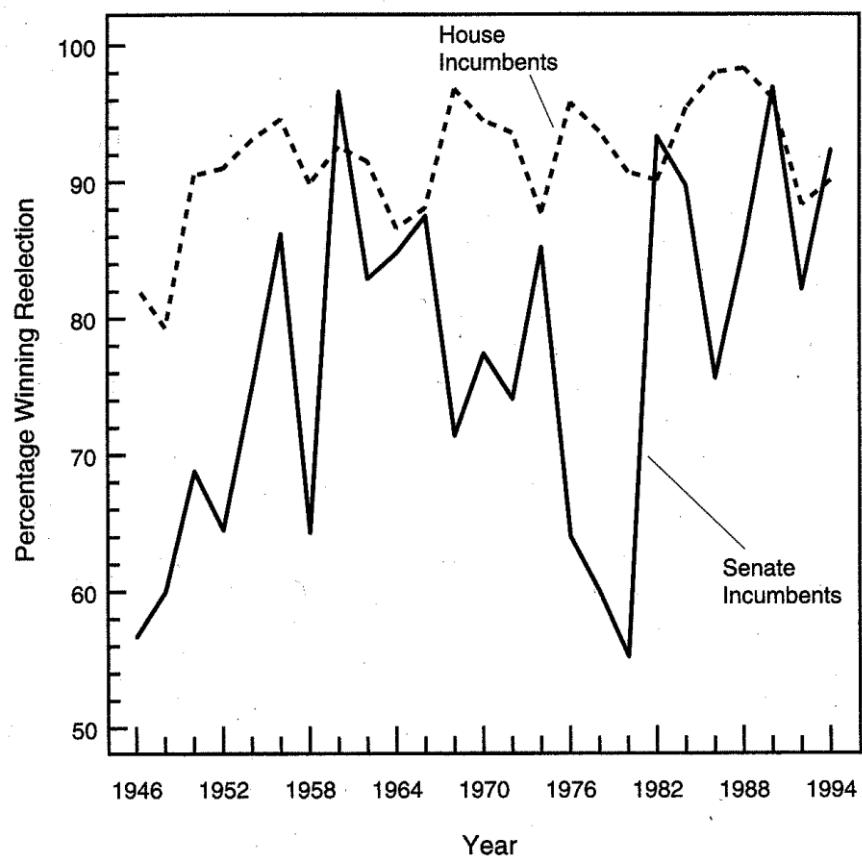


Figure 3.1 Success Rates of House and Senate Incumbents Seeking Reelection, 1946-1994

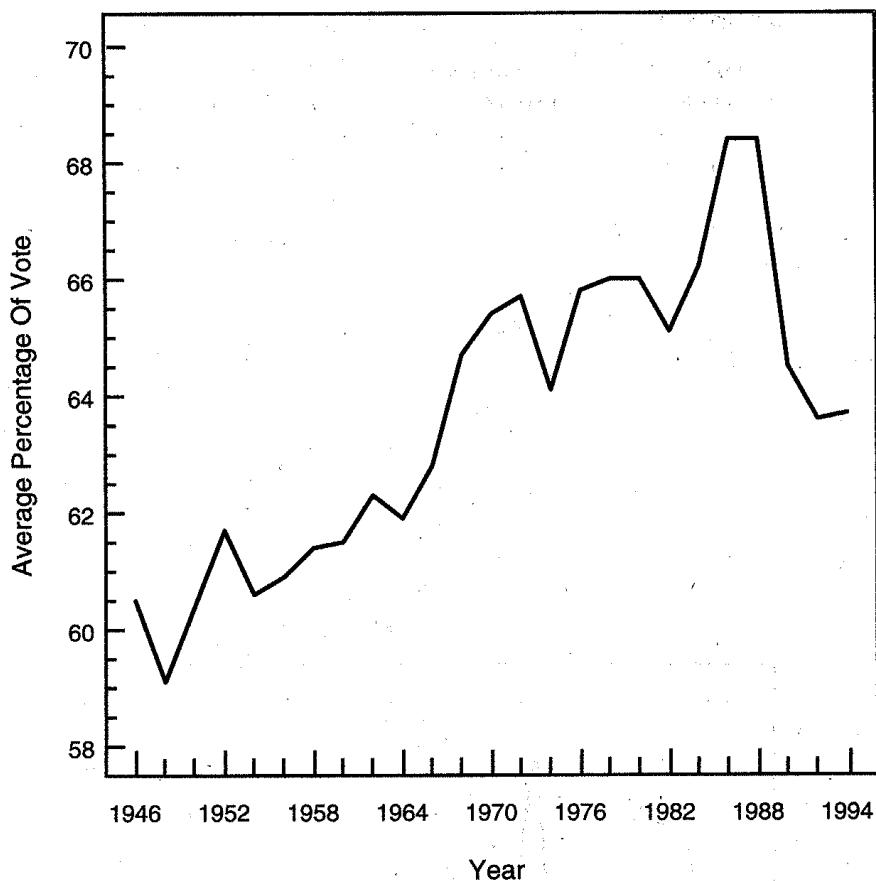


Figure 3.2 Average Percentage of Two-Party Vote Won by House Incumbents in Contested Elections, 1946–1994

68 percent. Since its peak in 1986 and 1988, it has dropped back below 64 percent but remains significantly above its pre-1968 average.

The incumbent's vote share is an ambiguous measure of the incumbency advantage, however. Some proportion of it reflects the partisan makeup of the district and would go with any candidate with the same party label; conceivably, all an incumbent's votes could fall into this category.² The incumbency advantage must therefore be gauged by how much better candidates do running as incumbents than they would as nonincumbents. Scholars have taken several approaches to estimating this difference, but all of them support the same conclusion: The electoral value of incumbency, measured in votes, increased sharply during the 1960s.

The simplest approach is to look at what happens to the district vote in adjacent elections with and without the incumbent. Thus scholars initially estimated the incumbency advantage by calculating the *sophomore surge* (the average gain in vote share won by candidates running as incumbents for the first time compared to their vote share in the initial election) and *retirement slump* (the average drop in the party's vote from the previous election when the incumbent departs and the

seat is thrown open).³ Averaged together into a single index, they form the *slurge*.⁴ More elaborate approaches have sought to refine estimates by eliminating selection bias and other sources of error in the components of the slurge.⁵ Although consensus has yet to emerge on which technique is most appropriate, the choice makes little practical difference. All of the indices tell the same basic story.

Figure 3.3 displays the postwar trends in two popular measures, the slurge and Gelman and King's index.⁶ Both show the growing value, in votes, of holding a House seat; both show a particularly sharp increase in the mid-1960s, and both show that the incumbency advantage, so measured, has persisted at the higher level into the 1990s. [According to the slurge, the value, in votes, of incumbency jumped from an average of 2.1 percent in the 1946–1966 period to 7.3 percent for 1968–1994; according to Gelman and King's index, it jumped from 3.3 percent to 9.1 percent. Changes in the slurge track changes in the average vote for incumbents] (Figure 3.2) very closely, indicating that they measure the same phenomenon.

The value, in votes, of Senate incumbency also increased during the 1960s. Trends in Senate elections are more difficult to detect because the number of contests is much smaller (33 or 34 in most election years), and only a third of the Senate's seats are automatically up in any election year. Still, careful analysis suggests

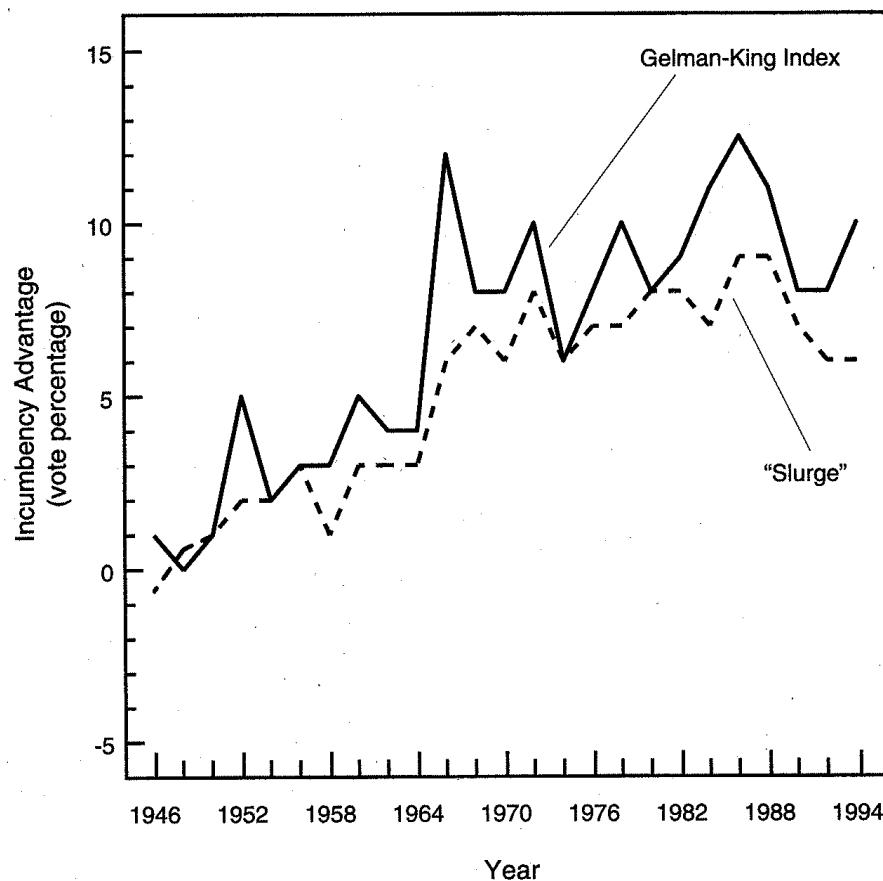


Figure 3.3 Incumbency Advantage in House Elections, 1946–1994

that Senate incumbency, worth a little more than 2 percent of the vote in elections from 1914 (when senators first became subject to popular election) to 1960, rose to 7 percent for the 1962–1992 period.⁷ Why this change did not make Senate elections involving incumbents any less competitive is a question I shall address later.

David Mayhew identified and named one effect of the augmented House incumbency advantage: The “vanishing marginals.”⁸ Increased vote shares meant that fewer incumbents held “marginal” seats—those taken with narrow margins of victory and so thought to be at heightened risk for future losses. Conventionally, seats won with less than some specified share of the two-party vote are designated marginal; 60 percent is the most common break point. Figure 3.4 shows how the proportion of incumbents whose vote lifted them out of the marginal range (60 percent or less) varied over the postwar period. Until 1966, an average of 61 percent of House incumbents won in excess of 60 percent of the vote; the proportion jumped to 73 percent for the 1968–1982 period (the jump that caught Mayhew’s eye) and higher still, to 83 percent, for 1984–1988. For the 1990–1994 period, however, it dropped back down to 70 percent. As Mayhew also pointed out (and Figure 3.4 shows), most contests for open seats have remained in the marginal range, so the vanishing marginals were *not* simply the effect of a more general decline in closely contested elections. Incumbency itself had something to do with it.

Scholars who first noticed the rise in the value of incumbency according to these measures understandably took it to signify a decline in electoral competition. With wider margins of safety, fewer incumbents should lose, turnover should decline, and therefore so should the *swing ratio*—the percentage of seats changing hands for a given percentage swing in the national partisan vote.⁹ Remarkably, none of these things occurred until more than a decade after they were anticipated, and not for the reasons initially proffered. We have already observed that House incumbents were no less likely to lose in the 1970s than they were in the 1950s. Neither—if marginality is defined correctly—did the number of marginal House seats decline over this period. And seat swings remained nearly as sensitive as before to vote swings.

Measures of marginality are, in essence, estimates of vulnerability. Members of Congress who win with less than some specified share of votes supposedly have a higher risk of defeat in the next election. Such thresholds are arbitrary, however, and make sense only if they are, in fact, stable indicators of vulnerability. Table 3.2, which lists the percentage of House incumbents at various margins who lost in the next election, shows that they are not. As the “marginal” incumbents (by the customary 60-percent standard) became safer, nonmarginal incumbents became more vulnerable. Indeed, an incumbent elected in the 1970s with between 60 and 65 percent of the vote was just as likely to lose in the next election as an incumbent in the 1950s who had been elected with 55 to 60 percent of the vote.

Although the mean incumbent’s vote increased by about 5 percentage points during the 1960s, then, incumbents added almost nothing to their electoral security in the 1970s because they were little safer with a 65-percent margin than they had been in the 1950s with a 60-percent margin, and their comparative risk at higher margins (above 65 percent) was also greater. Because incumbent defeats

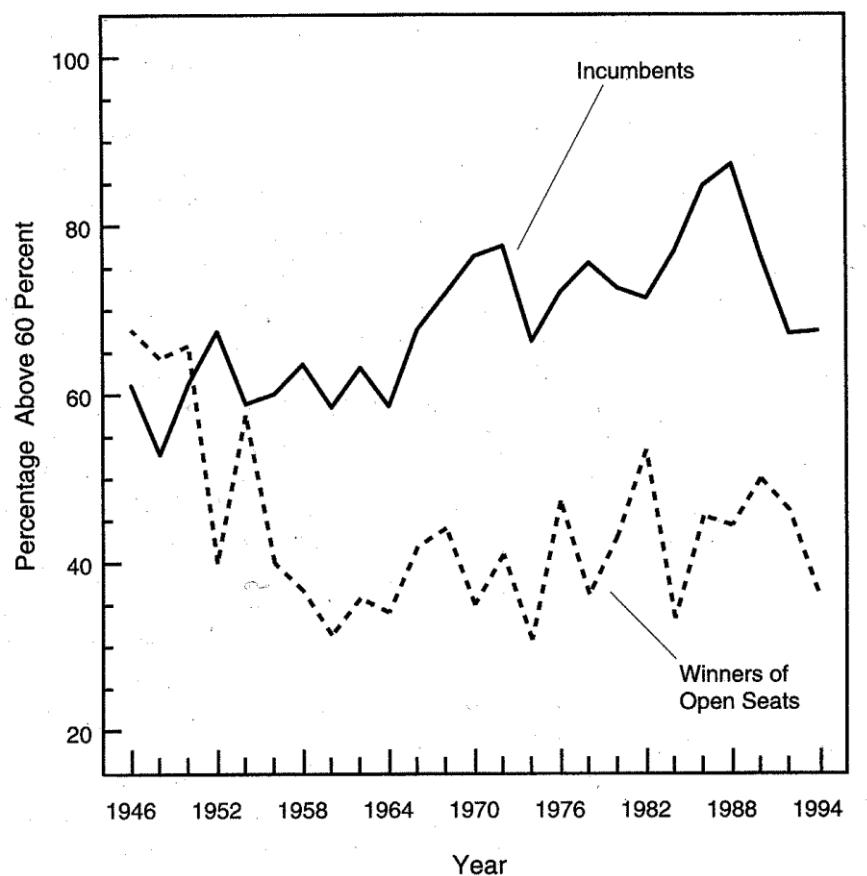


Figure 3.4 House Candidates Receiving More Than 60 Percent of the Two-Party Vote, 1946–1994

Table 3.2 INCUMBENTS DEFEATED IN GENERAL ELECTIONS TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, BY PREVIOUS VOTE MARGIN AND DECADE (IN PERCENTAGES)

Decade	Vote Margin in Previous Election			Standard Deviation of Vote Swing	Loser's Mean Vote in Prior Election	Losers Who Were Not Marginal
	50.0–59.9%	60.0–64.9%	< 65%			
1940s	27.8	4.2	1.4	5.2	54.4	6.9
1950s	13.4	2.4	1.2	5.1	55.5	12.8
1960s	12.8	3.2	1.2	6.4	57.8	19.3
1970s	11.6	6.9	2.7	8.5	58.5	35.0
1980s	9.5	4.6	0.8	7.6	58.3	30.3
1990s	14.4	10.9	1.3	7.5	60.3	40.4

Note: Includes only incumbents who faced major party opponents. Decades are defined by reapportionment cycles; for example, the 1950s include 1952 through 1960; the exceptions are the 1940s (1946 through 1950) and the 1990s (1992 through 1994).

did not diminish, and marginal seats—correctly defined—did not dwindle, there was no reason to expect the swing ratio to have been significantly lower during this time, and it was not.¹⁰

How could vote margins increase without adding to House incumbents' security, diminishing competition, or dampening swings? The answer lies in another crucial change first noticed by Thomas E. Mann: An attendant increase in the heterogeneity of inter-election vote swings among districts.¹¹ Consider a hypothetical case. Suppose the average incumbent wins with 55 percent of the vote and the inter-election vote swing is normally distributed with a standard deviation of 5 percentage points. This means that, other things equal, an incumbent with the average margin has about a .84 chance of winning in the next election because .16 of the normal curve falls one standard deviation below the mean (that is, in this case, below 50 percent). Now suppose the average incumbent's vote increases to 60 percent. If the standard deviation of the inter-election vote swing does not change, the average incumbent's probability of winning next time jumps to .98 because only .02 of the normal curve falls two standard deviations below the mean. But if the standard deviation increases to 10 percentage points, the incumbent's seat is just as much at risk as it was before.

With this in mind, observe the fourth column in Table 3.2. The table lists the standard deviation of inter-election swings in the Democratic vote across incumbent-held House districts averaged by decade. As the average incumbent's vote margin grew, so did the heterogeneity of inter-election vote swings. In the 1940s and 1950s, the standard deviation of the swing averaged 5.1; in the 1970s, it averaged 8.5. Vote margins could increase without making incumbents significantly safer because electorates became more volatile and idiosyncratic across districts.¹²

Additional evidence that larger vote margins did not necessarily enhance electoral safety appears in the last two columns of Table 3.2. The fifth column lists the mean vote share losing incumbents had won in the election immediately prior to their defeat. In the earlier decades, the typical loser had won about 55 percent of the vote in the previous election; in more recent decades, the typical loser's previous vote was closer to 60 percent. The sixth column lists the percentage of losing incumbents whose previous vote had put them out of the marginal range as it is customarily defined; in the more recent decades, a sharply higher proportion of losers had held seats by what was once thought to be a safe margin.

In the late 1980s, some of the effects anticipated from the "vanishing marginals" did finally come to pass. Incumbents were reelected at record rates in 1986 and 1988. The swing ratio finally underwent a statistically significant decrease (of about 25 percent).¹³ Critics proclaimed the end of electoral competition; President Ronald Reagan, among others, made the invidious observation that there was "less turnover in Congress than in the Supreme Soviet."¹⁴ Inc incumbency, it seems, had finally overwhelmed all other electoral forces. In retrospect, however, the elections of the late 1980s seem more an aberration than a new norm; all the relevant figures and tables in this chapter show a sharp revival of electoral competition for incumbent-held seats since then. Why did the predicted collapse of competition take so long to happen? Why did competition revive so vigorously in the 1990s?

These questions only begin the list of things we want to know about the nature of the incumbency advantage in congressional elections. Why do incumbents usually do so well? Why do House incumbents do so much better than Senate incumbents? Why did House incumbents' vote margins increase sharply in the mid-1960s and again in the mid-1980s, and then fall in the 1990s? Why did district electorates become more volatile, preventing incumbents from turning wider vote margins into greater electoral security? The answers are crucial to understanding congressional politics as well as congressional elections. They involve a complicated, interlocking set of institutional, behavioral, and contextual elements that we begin to examine in this chapter but will take the rest of the book to explicate fully.

SOURCES OF THE INCUMBENCY ADVANTAGE

A good starting point is to consider the institutional characteristics of Congress. David Mayhew, summarizing the results of his close examination of Congress as of the early 1970s, put it succinctly: "If a group of planners sat down and tried to design a pair of American national assemblies with the goal of serving members' reelection needs year in and year out, they would be hard pressed to improve on what exists."¹⁵

The congressional system that Mayhew described permitted the widest individual latitude for pursuing reelection strategies. For example, a highly decentralized committee and subcommittee structure allowed members to specialize in legislative areas where they could best serve local interests. It also provided most members with a solid piece of legislative turf. The operative norm for writing legislation was similar: Something for everyone. Positive-sum distributive politics, represented by the pork barrel and the Christmas tree bill (one with separate little "gifts" for a variety of special interest groups), were much more prevalent than the zero-sum competition for scarce resources. Members deferred to each other's requests for particular benefits for their states or districts in return for deference to their own.

The parties also bowed to the varied electoral needs of members. Party discipline within Congress was lightly applied. In the face of controversial and divisive issues, Mayhew noted, "the best service a party can supply to its congressmen is a negative one: It can leave them alone. And this is in general what the congressional parties do."¹⁶ Party leaders, taking the position that the first duty is to get reelected, encouraged members to "vote the district first"; members happily complied.

The system allowed members to take the "right" positions, make pleasing statements, and bring home the bacon while avoiding responsibility for the collective performance of Congress. It provided a setting for emphasizing individual achievements while insulating members from blame for the general failures and inadequacies of the institution, which were at least in part a consequence of the patterns of individual behavior encouraged by the system itself. This is important because the public's assessment of Congress' performance was often strongly negative. Ratings of Congress actually declined while House incumbents were increasing their vote margins in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Disdain for Congress did

not extend to its individual members; people generally rated their representatives far higher than their Congress.¹⁷

Members of Congress also voted themselves an astonishing array of official resources that could be used to pursue reelection. These include salary, travel, office, staff, and communication allowances that are now, by a conservative estimate, worth about \$1 million per year for House members and up to several times that much for senators (whose allowances vary by state population).¹⁸ All of these perquisites were augmented dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, with trends flattening out in the 1980s. The expansion of personal staffs of House and Senate members since 1930 is documented in Table 3.3. The sharpest increase occurred between 1957 and 1977. The value to members of personal staff was underlined in 1994 when the new Republican House majority voted to slash committee staff by one-third but rejected a proposal to reduce personal staff from 18 to 16.¹⁹ Travel allowances have grown in comparable fashion (see Table 3.4; before travel allowances became so generous, members would, of course, return to their districts on occasion at their own expense).

The growth of other official resources has kept pace. The most important congressional perquisite is the franking privilege, which allows members to use the mails free of charge for "official business," which is broadly interpreted to include most kinds of communications to constituents. Table 3.5 reveals that franked mail grew by more than an order of magnitude between the 1950s and 1980s. Public criticism led both houses to tighten up the rules governing franked mail in 1990, so the volume has fallen substantially from its peak in 1984. Even tighter rules were proposed by Republican reformers in 1994, but reforms were successfully opposed by newly elected members representing large western districts.²⁰ It is easy to understand members' reluctance to deny themselves such a serviceable tool. Other media have not been overlooked. Facilities for preparing radio and television tapes and films are available to members free of charge. In 1977, members

Table 3.3 PERSONAL STAFFS OF HOUSE AND SENATE MEMBERS, 1930-1993

Year	House Employees	Senate Employees
1930	870	280
1935	870	424
1947	1,440	590
1957	2,441	1,115
1967	4,055	1,749
1972	5,280	2,426
1977	6,942	3,554
1982	7,511	4,041
1987	7,584	4,075
1993	7,400	4,138

Source: Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics on Congress 1995-1996* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1995), table 5-2.

Table 3.4 HOUSE MEMBERS' PAID TRIPS TO THEIR DISTRICTS, 1962-1995

Year	Trips to District
1962	3
1966	5
1968	12
1973	18
1975	26
1977	33
1978 and later	unlimited ^a

Note: ^aSince 1978, travel expenses have been included in an overall lump sum for offices, equipment, supplies, postage, communications, and so on, which members may budget as they see fit. The lump-sum total for 1995 was \$568,560.

Source: Morris P. Fiorina, *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 61; Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics on Congress 1995-1996* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1995), table 5-12.

voted themselves unlimited WATS-line service for long-distance telephone calls. Many offices are now linked to the Internet.

Obviously, one major advantage of incumbency is control of extensive official resources for reaching and serving constituents. The remarkable expansion of these resources during the 1960s thus offered a ready explanation for larger incumbent vote margins: more vigorous exploitation of ever-expanding communications resources.²¹ The accepted ideas about voting behavior in congressional elections lent support to this view. Voters were known to favor candidates with whom they were familiar (that is, whose names they could recall when asked), so more extensive self-advertising by members could be expected to have direct electoral payoffs, assuming that it made them more familiar to voters. Apparently it did not. John Ferejohn showed that the proportion of voters who could recall incumbents' names did not increase between 1958 and 1970; nor did incumbents' familiarity advantage over their challengers grow. He proposed that a change in voting behavior was behind the enlarged incumbency advantage. Voters had become substantially less loyal to political parties during the 1960s and early 1970s. Perhaps they were merely substituting one simple voting cue, incumbency, for another party.²²

This explanation reflected a conception of voters as remarkably uninformed and superficial in their approach to voting decisions. As Chapter 5 will report in greater detail, this view of congressional voters has been challenged by more recent research. And if the congressional electorate is at least modestly more sophisticated and better informed than was once commonly thought, voters' preference for incumbents must arise from something more than the simple fact of incumbency.

Recognizing this, Morris Fiorina argued that members of Congress had enhanced their own electoral fortunes, not simply by advertising themselves more

Table 3.5 ELECTION-YEAR CONGRESSIONAL MAILINGS, 1954-1992

Year	Pieces of Mail (in millions)
1954	43.5
1956	58.2
1958	65.4
1960	108.0
1962	110.1
1964	110.5
1966	197.5
1968	178.2
1970	201.0
1972	308.9
1974	321.0
1976	401.4
1978	430.2
1980	511.3
1982	581.7
1984	924.6
1986	758.7
1988	804.9
1990	564.2
1992	458.0

Source: Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics on Congress 1995-1996* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1995), table 6-8.

extensively, but also by changing the focus of their activities and thus the content of the message they sent to voters. Essentially, they created needs, then reaped the rewards of spending more time and energy catering to them. In the decades following World War II, Congress enacted legislation that increased the size and scope of the federal government enormously. Government growth generated an increasing volume of demands from citizens for help in coping with bureaucratic mazes or in taking advantage of federal programs. Members responded to the demand by continually adding to their capacity to deliver assistance. The growth of personal staffs has already been noted. The placement of new staff was equally significant; a disproportionate share went into augmenting their capacity to provide services to constituents. Back in 1972, 13 percent of personal Senate staff and 23 percent of personal House staff worked in district or state offices; by 1994, the percentages had grown to 36 percent and 47 percent, respectively.²³

The greater demand for services and the greater resources for providing them created more opportunities for building credit with constituents. For electoral purposes, "the nice thing about case work is that it is mostly profit; one makes many more friends than enemies."²⁴ Casework is also nonpartisan. The party affiliation of the member delivering or that of the constituent receiving the assistance is irrelevant. What counts is the member's ability to deliver services, which increases

es with tenure in Washington and consequent seniority and familiarity with the administrative apparatus. It is, therefore, perfectly reasonable for voters to prefer candidates on the basis of their incumbency rather than on their party label or policy positions. And it is equally reasonable for members to concentrate on providing services rather than on making national policy as a strategy for staying in office.

Fiorina's thesis is still controversial because the pertinent evidence has been equivocal. The amount of time spent in the district appears to have little effect on the incumbent's vote margin, for example.²⁵ The value of the pork barrel has also been called into doubt, though the latest research suggests that Democrats, at least, have benefited from delivering local projects.²⁶ Nor is it fully established that personal and district services persuade voters to prefer incumbents, though again more recent research, including some clever experimental studies, indicate that they do.²⁷ Part of the analytic problem is that if members work the district harder the more insecure they are, then harder work may be associated with narrower electoral margins, even if it is what keeps the member in office.²⁸

As originally proposed, none of these explanations took note of the fact that, despite wider reelection margins, House incumbents kept losing at about the same rate as before until the late 1980s. Once this is recognized, the evidence marshaled on their behalf takes on a rather different cast. For example, it is striking that the steep increase in staff, travel, and communications allowances during the 1960s and 1970s failed to produce any net improvement in incumbents' reelection prospects at the time they were occurring. Not until the late 1980s—well after the growth in official resources had flattened out—did the average incumbent's probability of reelection actually grow, and that change was evidently only temporary. Considered in this light, it appears that incumbents spent a decade running ever harder just to stay in the same place.

Similarly, the idea that incumbents have prospered by exploiting the decline of partisanship among voters needs amendment. The basic argument is that a less partisan, more candidate-oriented electorate favors incumbents. Diminished partisanship means fewer automatic votes against an incumbent, so personal cultivation of the district can pay off in a wider vote margin. But it also means fewer automatic votes for an incumbent and so larger potential vote losses, should local electoral circumstances change.²⁹

Although it, too, was proposed as part of an explanation for greater incumbent security, Fiorina's main point, that incumbents' increased emphasis on nonpartisan district services has altered the meaning of the electoral choice, is not necessarily blunted if incumbents' security has been exaggerated. Attention to constituency service plainly does command an enlarged share of the time of members and their staffs.³⁰ Members elected since the mid-1970s in particular have "exhibited great ingenuity and phenomenal tenacity in 'cultivating' their districts."³¹ Fiorina's thesis thus helps explain why first-term House members, once much more vulnerable than more senior incumbents, became considerably more difficult to defeat.

Prior to the changes of the 1960s, new members were often swept into the House on a partisan tide, then swept out again two years later as it receded. Between 1946 and 1966, for example, 20.5 percent of all new House members lost

their first reelection bid, a rate of defeat nearly quadruple that of members who had served two or more terms (5.2 percent). Since then, first-termers have held onto newly won seats much more consistently; only 7.3 percent have lost, compared with 3.9 percent of more senior incumbents. Indeed, between 1968 and 1980, the defeat rates of newcomers (5.6 percent) and senior members (4.4 percent) did not differ significantly ($p = .24$). Since then, the greater vulnerability of new members has returned; in the 1980s and 1990s, 9.3 percent of first-termers, but only 3.4 percent of senior members, have lost.

Until the late 1980s, then, declining partisanship and more assiduous cultivation of House districts enhanced the reelection prospects mainly of first-term incumbents. After the first reelection, House members were actually more vulnerable in the 1970s than they had been before the changes of the 1960s. The advent of more candidate-centered politics did not automatically favor incumbents. A less-partisan electorate may make it easier for a representative to develop the kind of personal hold on a district that insulates him or her from external political forces. But a less-partisan electorate is also more fickle; support from constituents is easier to lose as well as to win; an easy victory one year does not guarantee reelection next time.³²

Nor did greater insulation from outside forces reduce uncertainty or risk. The locus of competition merely shifted to the district. The incumbent assumes a larger burden of responsibility for winning reelection. Before the mid-1960s, House members who lost could put much of the blame on forces beyond the district and hence their control. On average, their inter-election vote swing was only 4.5 percentage points worse than their party's mean swing. Since 1968, the average loser's vote swing has been 8.9 percentage points worse than their party's mean.

Inc incumbency remains a powerful advantage, to be sure. But its electoral value is clearly not a constant. It depends in part on what the incumbent does with the resources available and on how hard and shrewdly he or she works to build and maintain support in the district. And this varies, although the variation declined during the 1970s and 1980s as those members less inclined to endless pursuit of reelection quit or were weeded out. It depends even more on the kind of opposition the incumbent faces; as we shall see, differences in the skills and resources of challengers are a primary source of variation over time in incumbents' electoral fortunes. And it depends on what competing considerations shape voters' judgments, as the 1992 and 1994 elections made clear (for details, see Chapters 5 and 6).

It is safe to assume that incumbents who seek reelection want to stay in Congress. Why do some exploit the resources of office more vigorously than others to this end? The principal reason is that they have other important things to do with their time, energy, and staff. Single-minded pursuit of reelection detracts from work in Washington and therefore from a member's power and influence in Congress and impact on public policy. Reelection is an instrumental, not ultimate, goal. Sometimes opportunities to build support back in the district must be foregone if a member is to share in governing the country. And the longer a member is in office, the more opportunities arise to influence policy and to gain the respect of others in

government. Members very soon find that they have to balance their desire for electoral security against their desire for a successful career in Washington.

One reelection strategy might appear to diminish this trade-off. For incumbents who stake their electoral futures on their party's performance, cultivating the district could lose some of its urgency. Many of the Republicans taking office for the first time in 1994 initially wedded their fortunes to the party's "Contract with America," dedicating their energies to dismantling welfare and regulatory programs and balancing the budget. Whether they stick to this strategy, and, if they do, whether it is viable, are among the most interesting questions the next couple of elections should answer (I will have more to say about 1996 and beyond in Chapter 8). But even members far more interested in revolutionizing government than in lengthy congressional careers do not necessarily pay less attention to their districts. Losing would jeopardize the revolution. Insofar as supporting the Contract with America forces Republicans to cast politically dangerous votes, they have all the more reason to please constituents in every other way they can.

STRATEGIC POLITICIANS

Casework, trips back to the district, issuing newsletters, and all the other things members do to promote reelection are not aimed merely at winning votes in the next election. They are also meant to influence the perceptions formed by politically active people of the member's hold on the district. The electoral value of incumbency lies not only in what it provides to the incumbent, but also in how it affects the thinking of potential opponents and their potential supporters. Many incumbents win easily by wide margins because they face inexperienced, sometimes reluctant challengers who lack the financial and organizational backing to mount a serious campaign for Congress. If an incumbent can convince potentially formidable opponents and people who control campaign resources that he or she is invincible, the incumbent is very likely to avoid a serious challenge and so will be invincible—as long as the impression holds.

This is so because politically skilled and ambitious nonincumbents follow rational career strategies; people who control campaign resources make strategically rational decisions about deploying them; and the volume of campaign resources at the disposal of a nonincumbent candidate has a great deal to do with how well he or she does at the polls.

Other things being equal, the strongest congressional candidates are those for whom politics is a career. They have the most powerful motive and the greatest opportunity to master the craft of electoral politics. They are most likely to have experience in running campaigns and in holding elective office. They have the incentive and opportunity to cultivate other politically active and influential people and to put them under some obligation.

Ambitious career politicians also have the greatest incentive to follow a rational strategy for moving up the informal, but quite real, hierarchy of elective offices

in the American political system. An experienced politician will have acquired valuable political assets—most typically, a lower elective office—that increase the probability of moving to a higher office. But these assets are at risk and may be lost if the attempt to advance fails. Thus the potentially strongest congressional aspirants will also make the most considered and cautious judgments about when to try for a congressional seat.³³

Inc incumbency is central to their strategic calculations. Politically knowledgeable people are fully aware of the advantages of incumbency and of the long odds normally faced by challengers, and they adjust their behavior accordingly. Hence, for example, typically more than half the candidates for open House seats have previously held an elective office, while such experienced candidates comprise less than a quarter of the candidates challenging incumbents. Within this larger pattern, experienced challengers are more likely to run against incumbents who had closer contests in the last election. Table 3.6 presents the evidence for these points and shows the close association between the prospects for victory and the presence of experienced House candidates.³⁴

The career strategies of potential congressional candidates are complemented and reinforced by those of individuals and groups that control campaign resources. The most important of these resources is money, although other forms of assis-

Table 3.6 SUCCESS RATES AND QUALITY OF NONINCUMBENT HOUSE CANDIDATES, 1946–1994

Type of Race	Number of Cases	Winners (%)	Former Officeholders (%)
Open Seats			
No general election opponent	38	100.0	76.3
Held by candidate's party	1,006	73.7	66.8
Held by neither party	244	50.0	52.9
Held by opposite party	1,006	26.3	37.3
Total	2,294	50.0	52.5
Challengers to Incumbents			
Incumbent's vote in last election (%)			
50.0–54.9	1,657	20.3	44.7
55.0–59.9	1,582	8.5	28.9
60.0–64.9	1,514	4.4	19.2
65.0–69.9	1,289	2.3	14.1
70.0 or more	1,910	0.5	8.8
unopposed	1,557	1.1	5.1
Total	9,509	6.3	20.2

tance can also be valuable. People and groups contribute to congressional campaigns for reasons ranging from selfless idealism to pure venality. Regardless of the purpose, however, most contribute more readily to nonincumbent candidates in campaigns that are expected to be close.³⁵ So do political parties. (The situation regarding incumbents is somewhat different and will be discussed later.) Resources are limited, and most contributors deploy them where they have the greatest chance of affecting the outcome; donors naturally try to avoid wasting money on hopeless candidates. Table 3.7 shows the consequences of this tendency. In every election year for which data are available, more money is contributed to candidates running for open seats than to those challenging incumbents, and more is contributed to challengers who face incumbents who had smaller margins of victory in the previous election (a common measure of electoral vulnerability). Notice also the increasing concentration of resources in marginal districts and open seats over time. Challenges to nonmarginal incumbents have, by this standard, become weaker, one reason for the higher average vote won by House incumbents during the latter part of this period (see Figure 3.2).

Expectations about the likelihood of electoral success, then, influence the decisions of potential candidates and campaign contributors. The better the electoral odds, the more likely the race is to attract a strong challenger, and the more money will be contributed to his or her campaign. Furthermore, strong candidates themselves attract campaign money, and the availability of campaign money attracts strong candidates. A system of mutually reinforcing decisions and expectations thus links nonincumbent candidates and contributors with each other and with perceived electoral prospects. In contests involving incumbents, prospects are governed by an additional consideration: The availability of issues—personal, local, and national—that the candidate and campaign might use effectively to undermine the support the incumbent has enjoyed in past elections.

The strategies pursued by prospective congressional candidates and their prospective backers matter a great deal in a candidate-centered election process because the quality and experience of challengers, and the campaign resources made available to them, have a powerful effect on election results. I present a variety of evidence for this conclusion in the following pages. For now, the relevant point is that variations in the quality and resources of challengers offer an alternative explanation of increased vote margins enjoyed by incumbents since the 1960s.

Gary Cox and Jonathan Katz, for example, parse the House incumbency advantage into “direct,” “scare-off,” and “quality” effects. Direct effects are those derived from the expansion of resources and district activities we have already discussed. Scare-off effects contribute to the incumbency advantage when strong challenges are successfully discouraged. Quality effects measure the difference that candidate experience makes. (All incumbents are, by assumption, high-quality candidates; variation is supplied by nonincumbents, many of whom have never before held an elective office). Cox and Katz conclude that the most important source of growth in the incumbency advantage was an increase in the electoral effect of quality differences. The value of incumbency grew, not because of greater resources or more effective deterrence of quality challengers, but because the dif-

Table 3.7 ELECTORAL COMPETITION AND SPENDING BY NONINCUMBENT HOUSE CANDIDATES, 1972-1994 (IN THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS)

Year	Challenger's Party's Vote in Last Election			
	Less than 40%	40% to 44.9%	45% to 49.9%	Open Seats
1972	79	128	256	334
1974	88	157	199	276
1976	80	151	256	307
1978	88	187	400	460
1980	127	213	377	367
1982	135	224	343	407
1984	113	177	461	516
1986	94	312	437	581
1988	94	262	431	644
1990	67	236	365	554
1992	116	193	305	450
1994	105	322	433	580

Note: Expenditures are adjusted for inflation (1994 = 1.00).

Source: Compiled from data supplied by Common Cause, *1972 Congressional Campaign Finances*, 10 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1974), and *1974 Congressional Campaign Finances*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1976); Federal Election Commission, *Disclosure Series No. 9* (House of Representatives Campaigns), 1977; Federal Election Commission, *Disclosure Series No. 6* (Senatorial Campaigns), 1977; Federal Election Commission, *FEC Reports on Financial Activity, 1977-1978, Interim Report No. 5* (U.S. Senate and House Campaigns), 1979; Federal Election Commission, *FEC Reports on Financial Activity, 1979-1980, Final Report* (U.S. Senate and House Campaigns), 1982; Federal Election Commission, *FEC Reports on Financial Activity, 1981-1982, Interim Report No. 3* (U.S. Senate and House Campaigns), 1983; Federal Election Commission, *FEC Reports on Financial Activity, 1983-1984, Final Report* (U.S. Senate and House Campaigns), 1985; Federal Election Commission, "FEC Releases Final Report on Congressional Candidates," press release, May 5, 1988; Federal Election Commission, "\$485 Million Spent by 1988 Congressional Campaigns," press release, February 24, 1989; Federal Election Commission, "1990 Congressional Spending Drops to Low Point," press release, February 22, 1991; Federal Election Commission, "1992 Congressional Election Spending Jumps 52% to \$678 million," news release, March 4, 1993; Federal Election Commission, "1994 Congressional Fundraising Climbs to New High," news release, April 28, 1995.

ference in electoral performance between experienced and inexperienced candidates grew. They attribute this change to the weakening of party ties and the consequent growth of candidate-centered electoral politics.³⁶

David Brady, Brian Gaines, and Douglas Rivers, using somewhat different methods, reach a similar conclusion. Moreover, they find that the effect of the challenger's quality on the incumbent's vote has grown by about the same amount in Senate and House elections. Senators did not become more secure, however, because unlike House districts, states became more competitive—that is, more evenly balanced in a partisan sense—over the same time span, offsetting the growing incumbency advantage.³⁷ This research suggests that the incumbency advantage depends not so much on what incumbents do, but on what potential opponents do, and that it has grown because the impact of the opposition's level of mobilization has grown.

MONEY IN CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

Mobilization requires money. Congressional aspirants are wise, indeed, to worry about the availability of money for the campaign. How well nonincumbent candidates do on election day is directly related to how much campaign money they raise and spend. The precise relationship between campaign spending and election results is difficult to pin down, however, because most candidates and contributors act strategically. Potential donors try to avoid wasting their money on hopeless causes. The better a candidate's prospects, the more contributors of all kinds are willing to invest in the campaign. The connection for nonincumbents between spending and votes is therefore at least potentially reciprocal: money may help win votes, but the expectation that a candidate can win votes also brings in money. To the degree that (expected) votes influence spending, ordinary measures of association will exaggerate the effects of spending on votes.

Spending by incumbents is also reciprocally related to the vote, but in a rather different way: the higher the incumbent's expected vote, the less money flows into the campaign. This is not because secure incumbents have trouble raising money; quite the contrary. Many interest groups contribute to campaigns not so much to influence the outcome as to gain influence with, or at least access to, people who are likely to be in a position to help or hurt them. They waste no money on sure losers but have no qualms about giving money to sure winners, even when it is not really needed. Whether or not incumbents tap this source of funds depends on whether they think they need the money (or might some time in the foreseeable future).

Members of Congress do not particularly enjoy asking for money, and many avoid doing so if they do not see a pressing need for it (given the strength of the opposition they are facing). If they feel threatened, though, incumbents have sources that are not nearly so readily available to challengers. In addition to groups seeking access, party committees and ideological interest groups rally to support threatened incumbents of the preferred party or ideology on the ground that it is easier to hold on to a seat than to take one from the opposition. Incumbents, then, can generally raise as much campaign money as they think they need. Again, the anticipated vote affects spending. But for incumbents, the relationship is negative: the larger their expected vote, the less they raise and spend. To the degree that (expected) votes influence spending, ordinary measures will underestimate the effects of incumbent spending on votes.

To measure the effect of campaign spending on votes or victories, then, it is necessary to subtract the reciprocal effect of (expected) votes or victories on spending. Although theoretically feasible, this turns out to be extremely difficult in practice, and after 20 years of research, the appropriate solution remains elusive. We simply do not know the extent to which analyses that ignore the problem overestimate the effects of challenger spending or underestimate the effects of incumbent spending—if at all.

Nonetheless, certain things are clear. First, congressional challengers rarely win if they do not spend a substantial amount of money, and the more they spend, the more likely they are to win. Table 3.8 leaves no doubt on this point. It lists the percentage of winning challengers in House elections from 1972 through 1994 at

ascending levels of campaign spending (adjusted for inflation, 1994 = 1.00). Viewing all the election years together (the first column), the odds against challengers who spent less than \$100,000 were long indeed; 61 percent of all House challengers fell into this category. Chances were only modestly better for challengers who spent between \$100,000 and \$200,000; they and the first group subsume 75 percent of all challengers. Prospects improve sharply as spending exceeds \$200,000. The most extravagant challengers (spending \$500,000 or more) won about one-third of their races.

Of course, not all election years are alike. Some elections feature national political tides—driven by recessions, scandals, presidential politics, and the like—that strongly favor one party's candidates. Conditions in other years seem nearly neutral between parties. Intuitively, a House challenger's chances of winning should vary with the strength and direction of national partisan tides. Table 3.8 (third column) shows that challengers favored by national forces—Democrats in 1974 and 1982, Republicans in 1980, 1984, and 1994—win more frequently at every level of campaign spending. Those spending more than \$300,000 win more than one-third of their contests; anything over \$200,000 is enough to make a race of it. Note also that challengers are able to spend more money in good election years; for example, 18 percent spent more than \$400,000 in the good years, compared with 10 percent in neutral and bad years. This is further evidence of strategic behavior on the part of contributors.

Table 3.8 WINNING HOUSE CHALLENGERS, BY LEVEL OF CAMPAIGN SPENDING, 1972–1994 (IN PERCENTAGES)

Expenditure Range ^a	All Years	Neutral Years	Good Years	Bad Years
0– 49	0.1% (1,866)	0.0% (1,141)	0.3% (358)	0.0% (367)
50– 99	0.2 (514)	0.0 (303)	0.0 (111)	1.0 (100)
100–149	3.1 (318)	1.1 (188)	8.3 (84)	2.2 (46)
150–199	1.8 (227)	0.0 (139)	5.4 (56)	3.1 (32)
200–249	11.1 (190)	7.8 (103)	21.4 (56)	3.2 (31)
250–299	13.9 (151)	14.4 (83)	23.7 (38)	0.0 (30)
300–399	14.9 (235)	7.7 (130)	34.4 (64)	7.3 (41)
400–499	22.4 (174)	17.4 (86)	39.3 (56)	6.3 (32)
500–599	27.8 (97)	34.0 (50)	29.0 (31)	6.3 (16)
600–699	29.2 (65)	20.6 (34)	50.0 (24)	0.0 (7)
700 +	35.8 (137)	20.3 (64)	61.4 (57)	6.3 (16)
Total	5.9 (3,891)	3.8 (2,244)	14.2 (933)	1.5 (714)

Note: ^aIn thousands of dollars

Note: Expenditures are adjusted for inflation (1994 = 1.00); the number of cases is in parentheses; neutral years were 1972, 1976, 1978, 1986, 1988, 1990, and 1992; 1974 and 1982 were good years for Democratic Challengers and bad years for Republican challengers; 1980, 1984, and 1994 were good for Republicans, bad for Democrats. A good year is defined as one in which the aggregate national two-party vote for the party was at least 3 percentage points higher than it had been in the previous election.

Source: See Table 3.7.

In the absence of strong partisan tides, challengers have a much harder time winning and need to spend more than \$500,000 to get beyond a one-in-six chance of winning. Against contrary partisan tides, challengers raise the least amount of money and find it difficult to win no matter what they spend.

What do these data tell us about the cost of a minimally competitive challenge? Obviously, it varies from district to district and from state to state, depending on the structure and cost of mass-media advertising, the vigor of local parties and other politically active organizations, and local campaign styles. It also varies with national partisan tides, and it has certainly grown over time (even when inflation is taken into account). Still, if we set an arbitrary but reasonable standard for a competitive campaign as one giving the challenger at least a 20 percent chance of winning, \$400,000 (in 1994 dollars) is a plausible estimate for the threshold for the entire period. Only 12 percent of all House challengers crossed this threshold; a large majority spent far too little to make a contest of it. If analysis is confined to the most recent elections, the minimum price tag for a competitive House campaign under average conditions today is probably closer to \$600,000.

Defeating a House incumbent is expensive (and a serious Senate campaign can cost more than ten times as much in a large state such as California, New York, or Texas); relatively few challengers have been able to raise enough funds to be serious threats. Those who do acquire sufficient resources can make incumbents feel anything but safe. For incumbents, spending a great deal of money on the campaign is a sign of weakness rather than strength. In fact, the more money they spend on the campaign, the worse they do on election day. That is, the relationship between the incumbent's level of spending and share of votes or likelihood of victory is *negative*. Spending money does not cost them votes, to be sure; rather, incumbents raise and spend more money the more strongly they feel themselves challenged. The more their opponent spends, the more they spend. But challengers evidently get more bang for the buck; therefore, the more spent by both the challenger and the incumbent, the greater the challenger's share of the vote and the more likely the challenger is to win the election.³⁸

Table 3.9 displays these relationships, much simplified. It lists the percentage of winning challengers at different combinations of incumbent and challenger spending in the five most recent elections. The column average shows that the more challengers spent, the more likely they were to win. Only 2 of the 1,260 (0.2 percent) who spent less than \$200,000 won, while nearly a third of those spending more than \$600,000 replaced the incumbent. The row average shows that the more incumbents spent, the more likely they were to lose. None in the lowest category of spenders failed to win reelection; 15 percent in the highest category did so. At any given level of incumbent spending, challengers do better the more they spend; at any given level of challenger spending, the incumbent's spending makes little apparent difference in the outcome. The variation across every row is statistically significant at $p < .001$; the variation down every column is insignificant ($p > .10$).

More elaborate multivariate models that analyze votes or victories as a function of campaign spending and other variables (national tides, district partisanship, and so forth) tell exactly the same story.³⁹ The pattern appears in Senate elections

Table 3.9 CAMPAIGN SPENDING AND CHALLENGER VICTORIES, 1986-1994

	Challenger's Spending ^a				Row Average
	< 200	200-400	400-600	> 600	
Incumbent's Spending					
< 200	0.0 (216)	0.0 (5)	0.0 (1)	0.0 (1)	0.0 (223)
200-400	0.0 (468)	6.4 (31)	0.0 (5)	0.0 (5)	0.4 (509)
400-600	0.0 (340)	7.0 (57)	24.0 (31)	28.5 (12)	2.7 (429)
600-800	0.7 (136)	8.6 (58)	28.6 (28)	31.8 (22)	8.3 (244)
> 800	1.0 (100)	14.3 (63)	15.9 (63)	36.2 (69)	15.0 (295)
Column Average	0.2 (1,260)	9.3 (214)	19.7 (122)	32.7 (104)	4.7 (1,700)

Note: ^aIn thousand dollars, adjusted.

as well.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the problem of reciprocal causation renders all such results suspect. Because challengers raise more money the better they are expected to do, this kind of analysis exaggerates the effects of their campaign spending. Because incumbents raise *less* money the better they are expected to do (remember, their spending is reactive), the analysis underestimates the effects of their spending. What we do not know is by how much.

Scholars have estimated a variety of models designed to take reciprocal causation into account, but the findings vary widely. At one extreme, results simply reinforce the original findings; at the other, they suggest marginal returns on spending are as high for incumbents as for challengers.⁴¹ Most often however, they suggest that the marginal returns on spending are indeed greater for challengers than for incumbents but to a lesser degree than the original findings would indicate. And at least two studies have found that the returns on spending by first-term incumbents are about as large as the returns on spending by their opponents and much larger than the returns on spending by more senior members.⁴²

Despite the uncertainties that remain, several things are abundantly clear. Challengers (and candidates for open seats who face well-financed opponents) rarely win without spending a great deal of money. Even rarer is a losing incumbent who might plausibly blame defeat on a shortage of funds.⁴³ Moreover, there are solid reasons why challengers *should* get a larger return on their spending than do incumbents. However, there are also good reasons for believing that, under some circumstances, the incumbent's spending should affect the outcome as well.

Campaign spending is subject to diminishing returns; the more dollars spent, the less gained by each additional dollar. Congressional incumbents usually exploit their official resources for reaching constituents so thoroughly that the additional increment of information about their virtues put forth during the campaign adds

comparatively little to what is already known and felt about them. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the extent to which voters know and like incumbents is unrelated to how much is spent on the campaign. The situation is quite different for nonincumbents. Most are largely unknown before the campaign, and the extent to which they penetrate the awareness of voters—which is crucial to winning votes—is directly related to how extensively they campaign. The money spent on nonincumbents' campaigns buys the attention and recognition that incumbents already enjoy at the outset of the campaign.

If this is true, we would expect spending by both candidates to affect the outcomes of contests for open seats, as indeed it does. Table 3.10 displays the relationships in their most elementary form. Democrats do better the more they spend, Republicans do better the more they spend. Democrats thrive in the combinations appearing in the upper right-hand section of the matrix (winning 79 percent of the time), Republicans thrive in the lower left-hand section (winning 84 percent of the time). Along the diagonal, results are split (Democrats win 54 percent overall). Multivariate analyses recapitulate these results.⁴⁴

In general, then, spending should matter more to nonincumbent candidates because they have yet to get their message out, and getting a message out costs money. It may also matter to incumbents if they have to get out a *new* message. That is, when an incumbent is in trouble for some reason—personal, such as involvement in the House bank scandal in 1992, or political, as with Democrats facing the Republican tide in 1994—and needs to counter with a new pitch, campaign money is essential.

It boils down to this: Regardless of their potential, if challengers cannot raise lots of money, they can forget about winning. If incumbents are strongly challenged, raising and spending lots of money may not help them much, though there is no reason to think it hurts. Even if the marginal return on spending by incum-

Table 3.10 CAMPAIGN SPENDING AND DEMOCRATIC VICTORIES IN OPEN SEATS,
1986–1994

		Democrat's Spending ^a				Row Average
		< 200	200–400	400–600	> 600	
Republican's Spending						
< 200		50.0 (4)	94.1 (17)	94.5 (22)	100.0 (10)	92.4 (53)
200–400		25.0 (4)	63.6 (11)	54.5 (11)	50.0 (8)	50.0 (36)
400–600		0.0 (5)	25.0 (20)	29.4 (17)	66.7 (24)	39.4 (66)
> 600		0.0 (14)	0.0 (11)	27.7 (18)	47.4 (38)	28.4 (244)
Column Average		11.1 (27)	50.0 (62)	55.1 (69)	60.0 (80)	50.4 (244)

Note: ^aIn thousands of dollars, adjusted.

bents is very small, spending a great deal of money is probably a rational strategy because even a small number of votes may make the difference between winning and losing.

DISCOURAGING THE OPPOSITION

Plainly, though, spending huge sums of money does not ensure reelection. What matters much more is the amount spent by the challenger (and, related to it, how qualified and skillful he or she is). This means that *the incumbent's most effective electoral strategy is to discourage serious opposition.* The most effective way to do this is to avoid showing signs of electoral vulnerability. Even the most implacable political enemies will not mobilize their full range of resources against an incumbent if they see no prospect of success. Maintaining an active presence in the district helps to discourage the opposition.⁴⁵ So does working to maintain the electoral coalition that put the member into office in the first place. Since elections are the most pertinent source of information on a member's electoral strength, it is particularly important to avoid slippage at the polls. An unexpectedly weak showing in one election inspires even stronger opposition in the next. As one incumbent put it, "It is important for me to keep the young state representatives and city councilmen away. If they have the feeling that I'm invincible, they won't try. That reputation is very intangible. [But] your vote margin is part of it."⁴⁶

It is also shrewd strategy for incumbents to diminish the intensity of opposition in the district. No one can please everyone, and nothing is to be gained by alienating one's supporters. But occasional friendly gestures to potentially hostile political forces may be sufficient to dampen their enthusiasm for organizing an all-out campaign against the member. From an incumbent's perspective, then, elections are not merely discrete hurdles to be cleared at regular two-year intervals. They are, as Richard F. Fenno, Jr.'s unique research has shown, a series of connected events that form part of a "career in the district," which parallels the career in Washington.⁴⁷ Winning is always crucial, of course, but winning in a way that minimizes future opposition is just as desirable in the long run.

Other important insights into congressional election processes emerge from thinking in terms of congressional careers rather than single elections. Fenno discovered that House members' careers in the district passed through identifiable stages. In the first, *expansionist phase*, members devote a great deal of time and energy to building up their base of regular supporters. Beginning with a core of solid backers, they work to reach additional individuals and groups in the district that they hope to incorporate into their electoral coalition. The expansionist phase begins before the first election and continues for at least a few more. The capacity of first-term members to increase their electoral margins, even in the face of strongly contrary electoral tides, is a sign of this effort and its efficacy.

At some point, after a few elections, members typically enter into a *protectionist phase*, during which they work to maintain the support they have built up over the years, but no longer attempt to add to it. By this time they have often discouraged serious opposition by a show of growing electoral strength, and they have

been in Washington long enough to have acquired some influence and responsibility. Working the district becomes a less attractive alternative to making policy and exercising legislative skills. It is at this stage that members risk "losing touch with the district," to use the politicians' cliche. If they do, they become electorally vulnerable. But their vulnerability may not become apparent at all until it is tested.

This pattern of congressional career development governs the efficacy of strategies pursued by nonincumbents seeking congressional seats. The best opportunity arises when the incumbent dies or retires, and it is not uncommon to find ambitious young politicians biding their time until a seat becomes open, after which a lively scramble ensues among them for the nomination and election.⁴⁸ First-term members also attract unusually vigorous opposition; their challengers are twice as likely to have held elective public office and spend, on average, nearly twice as much money as challengers to more senior incumbents. The strategic assumption is that newly elected members do not have as firm a hold on their districts as they will later develop, so it is better to go after them now than later.⁴⁹ Politicians who use electoral margins as evidence of electoral vulnerability will focus on these new incumbents because so many of them initially win office in close elections. Incumbents who survive the first bid for reelection should be most vulnerable in the protectionist stage of their careers. Electoral support is not won once and for all. It requires continual renewal and reinforcement, all the more now that party loyalties are weaker and the incumbent's personal performance more central to voters' decisions. Members who work merely to maintain their base of support may actually let it slip, especially if they enjoy a few elections with feeble opposition that disguises any weakening of their hold on the district. A challenger who, through luck or cleverness, puts together a serious campaign against a member whose hold on the district has imperceptibly atrophied may surprise everyone, including the incumbent and challenger.

One example is Duncan Hunter, who defeated Democratic incumbent Lionel Van Deerlin in the 1980 contest for the 42nd District of California. Van Deerlin had not been seriously challenged in years; he was unaware of his own electoral weakness and of the progress his challenger was making until it was too late to do anything about it. Hunter had decided to run only at the last minute and then on the theory that, although he was likely to lose, he would be in a stronger position to take the seat in 1982, especially if, as many anticipated, Van Deerlin retired. Hunter's hesitation did not prevent a vigorous and well-financed campaign, and he wound up with 53 percent of the vote, compared with the 24 percent won by the token Republican challenger in 1978—a shift of 29 percentage points between the two elections.

Van Deerlin was only the most surprised of a number of senior House Democrats in 1980. Republican challengers defeated 14 incumbents who had served at least 5 terms, 8 who had served at least 9 terms. Similar unpleasant surprises awaited some senior incumbents in 1990; 8 who had served 5 or more terms were defeated, and many more had unexpectedly close calls when their vote declined sharply from their showing in 1988. The 1992 and 1994 elections also proved disastrous for some entrenched members, in the first instance because of the House bank scandal (discussed in Chapter 6), in the second, because of the powerful

Republican tide. Among the victims (all Democrats) in 1994 were Tom Foley of Washington, Speaker of the House (15 terms); Jack Brooks of Texas, chairman of the Judiciary Committee (21 terms); Neal Smith of Iowa, Appropriations subcommittee chairman (18 terms); and Dan Glickman of Kansas, chairman of the Intelligence Committee (9 terms).

The 1992 and 1994 elections offer a powerful illustration of how fickle contemporary district electorates can be. A member's personal relationship with constituents can keep the district safely in the member's hands, but only through a continuing high level of personal attention, and only if potent new issues detrimental to the incumbent do not intrude. Mayhew noted that, to say "Congressman Smith is unbeatable" means only that he "is unbeatable as long as he continues to do the things he is doing."⁵⁰ After the 1994 election, we should add, and only as long as what he is doing is what voters care about when deciding how to vote. A wide reelection margin is maintained only through unrelenting entrepreneurial effort; let there be a letup or a slipup that attracts and is exploited by a formidable opponent wielding a potent issue, and it can evaporate quickly. The decline of partisanship among voters permits individual representatives to establish personal ties to their districts, but only as long as they are willing to invest the time and energy required to maintain them; even then, there is no guarantee that personal ties will prevail in the face of troublesome new issues. If they refuse to pay this price, or if troublesome new issues do emerge, members may be even more vulnerable to challengers than they were in the days when they could count on a larger core of party regulars for a reliable base of support.

Most members are willing to pay the price, at least for a time; retirement or defeat awaits those who refuse.⁵¹ Since most incumbents do work hard to remain in office and are therefore extremely difficult to defeat, it is not absurd to ask why, under most circumstances, anyone challenges them at all. Part of the answer is that a fair proportion of incumbents are not challenged. In 1990, for example, 21 percent of the House incumbents had no general election opposition; 18 percent were unopposed in both the primary and general election. But most are challenged, even those who appear to be unbeatable. Why?

One reason suggested by studies of congressional challengers is naivete. As David Leuthold notes in his study of San Francisco area congressional campaigns, "Inexperienced candidates often did not realize that they had no chance of winning."⁵² Most challengers recognize that the odds are against them, of course, but their hopes may be buoyed by the inherent uncertainties of electoral politics and a large dose of self-deception. Writing from personal experience—he is a political scientist who ran for Congress but did not get past the primary—Sandy Maisel points out that "Politicians tend to have an incredible ability to delude themselves" about their electoral prospects.⁵³

Maisel's report of his own and other congressional primaries in 1978 provides several additional insights into the question. Many congressional candidates had planned for years to run for Congress—some day. The only question was when; and when circumstances seem only a little bit more favorable than usual, their thinking was, "If not now, when?" Or, more desperately, "Now or never."⁵⁴

Candidates can delude themselves all the more easily when they lack the resources to discover just how difficult their task is; impoverished candidates cannot afford a top-quality poll to gauge their status with the electorate. They most often rely instead on their own political intuition and, to a lesser degree, on the opinions of local political leaders.⁵⁵ Both are inclined to tell them what they want to hear, so it is not difficult to see why they might overestimate their chances.

Other scholars, though, discern rationality rather than naivete when the inexperienced challenge entrenched incumbents. Jeffrey Banks and D. Roderick Kiewiet argue that inexperienced challengers choose to run when their prospect of defeating the incumbent appears dim because this nonetheless maximizes their probability of getting elected to Congress. Because the long odds deter ambitious career politicians, political neophytes are much more likely to win the nomination than they would be if conditions were more promising (for example, if the incumbent had retired). Their much greater chance of winning the nomination more than offsets the smaller chance of knocking off the incumbent in the general election. The odds may be very long, but still the best an inexperienced amateur can envision.⁵⁶

At least a few such candidates are rewarded with unanticipated success, and that no doubt encourages others to take the plunge. In 1988, for instance, Ronald Matchley, a political novice, was nominated unopposed (the expected nominee, a former state party chair, inexplicably failed to meet the filing deadline) to face Democratic Representative Fernand J. St. Germain, the powerful chairman of the Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs. He was able to exploit St. Germain's ethical problems to achieve "the most improbable triumph in recent Rhode Island history."⁵⁷ In 1990, first-time candidates managed to defeat Douglas Walgren of Pennsylvania and Robert Kastenmeier of Wisconsin though there was little prior indication that these veteran House incumbents were vulnerable.

Moreover, elections such as 1992 and 1994 show that boldness is sometimes rewarded across the board. Challengers who had put themselves in position to exploit the House bank scandal or popular disgust with Clinton and gridlock ended up with a great shot at the brass ring. No doubt many of the Republican newcomers elected in 1994 were surprised to find themselves in the House, let alone in the majority. Their experience will serve as an seductive object lesson for prospective challengers for years to come.

Even candidates who are certain they will not win find motives for running. The most common reason given is to provide some opposition, to make sure the party is represented on the ballot, "to demonstrate that the party had a spark of life in the district."⁵⁸ Party leaders may run themselves when they are unable to find anyone else willing to face a drubbing.⁵⁹ Some run to build for their own or the party's future, as did many southern Republicans in the 1950s and early 1960s. Others run to promote strongly held ideological beliefs. Opponents of abortion and other religious conservatives have swelled the ranks of Republican challengers in recent years; in 1992, several of them used the legal requirement that TV stations run campaign ads uncensored to broadcast anti-abortion messages featuring graphic footage of aborted fetuses.⁶⁰ Still others evidently run in order to advertise themselves in their professions; this reason is not often volunteered, and with the

profession of politics in such low repute, it may no longer be so common. But for much of the postwar period, a remarkable proportion of young attorneys, insurance agents, and real estate brokers turned up as challengers in districts where they had little hope of winning.⁶¹ Finally, some apparently find the process of running itself reward enough.⁶²

Challengers who are naive, inexperienced, self-deceiving, or running without hope of winning do not make particularly formidable opponents. Incumbents blessed with such opposition win reelection easily. Still, every so often one is rudely surprised, for uncertainty is an inevitable component of congressional election politics. In important respects, electoral uncertainty has actually increased in recent years. Congressional incumbents have no monopoly on entrepreneurial electoral politics. They now face institutional players—political action committees, national party campaign committees, professional campaign outfits, polling and direct mail firms—equally adept at exploiting current technologies and electoral habits. How this has affected campaign politics is a subject for the next chapter.

NOTES

1. This is evident when we regress the percentage of incumbents seeking reelection who were successful against the election year (1950 = 1, 1952 = 2, . . . 1994 = 23). The estimated equation is

$$\text{Percentage of Successful Incumbents} = 91.1 + .11 \text{ Election Year}$$

(1.4) (.11)

Adjusted R² = .01

The standard errors are in parentheses. The coefficient on the temporal variable (election year) is no larger than its standard error and so is statistically indistinguishable from zero.

2. John R. Alford and David W. Brady, "Personal and Partisan Advantage in U.S. Congressional Elections, 1846–1990," in *Congress Reconsidered*, 5th ed., ed. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I Oppenheimer (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1993), pp. 146–147.
3. Albert D. Cover and David R. Mayhew, "Congressional Dynamics and the Decline of Competitive Congressional Elections," in *Congress Reconsidered*, 2nd ed., ed. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1981), p. 70; see also Robert S. Erikson, "Malapportionment, Gerrymandering, and Party Fortunes in Congressional Elections," *American Political Science Review* 66 (1972), p. 1240.
4. David W. Brady, Brian Gaines, and Douglas Rivers, "The Incumbency Advantage in the House and Senate: A Comparative Institutional Analysis" (manuscript, Stanford University, 1994).
5. Andrew Gelman and Gary King, "Measuring Incumbency Without Bias," *American Journal of Political Science* 34 (1990), pp. 1142–64; Michael Krashinsky and William J. Milne, "The Effects of Incumbency in U.S. Congressional Elections, 1950–1988," *Leg-*

- islative Studies Quarterly* 18 (1993), pp. 321–344; Brady, Gaines, and Rivers, “Incumbency Advantage.”
6. Gelman and King compute the incumbency advantage by regressing the Democrat’s share of the two-party vote on the Democrat’s vote in the previous election, the party holding the seat, and incumbency (which takes a value of 1 if the Democratic candidate is an incumbent, –1 if the Republican is an incumbent, 0 if the seat is open). The coefficient on the incumbency variable estimates the value (in percentage of votes) of incumbency for each election year.
 7. Brady, Gaines, and Rivers, “Incumbency Advantage,” table 3.
 8. David R. Mayhew, “Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals,” *Polity* 6 (1974), pp. 295–317.
 9. To calculate the swing ratio, simply divide the change in the percentage of seats a party wins by the change in the percentage of votes it wins; for example, if one party’s share of seats rises from 45 percent to 55 percent when its share of the vote rises from 47 percent to 52 percent, the swing ratio is $2.0 = (55 - 45)/(52 - 47)$; see Erikson, “Malapportionment,” pp. 1240–1241; Edward R. Tufte, “The Relationship Between Seats and Votes in Two-Party Systems,” *American Political Science Review* 67 (1973), pp. 540–554; Mayhew, “Congressional Elections,” pp. 312–314; Cover and Mayhew, “Congressional Dynamics,” p. 78; Morris P. Fiorina, “The Case of the Vanishing Marginals: The Bureaucracy Did It,” *American Political Science Review* 71 (1977), p. 177.
 10. John A. Ferejohn and Randall Calvert, “Presidential Coattails in Historical Perspective,” *American Journal of Political Science* 28 (1984), p. 131; Gary C. Jacobson, “The Marginals Never Vanished: Incumbency and Competition in Elections to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1952–1982,” *American Journal of Political Science* 31 (1987), pp. 126–141.
 11. Thomas E. Mann, *Unsafe at Any Margin: Interpreting Congressional Elections* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977) p. 90.
 12. The increase in volatility remains when effects of changes in the sophomore surge and retirement slump are removed; see Gary C. Jacobson, *The Electoral Origins of Divided Government: Competition in U.S. House Elections, 1946–1988* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 17–18.
 13. Ibid., pp. 82–93.
 14. Washington Post, May 24, 1989, B3:4.
 15. David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 81–82.
 16. Ibid., pp. 99–100.
 17. Glenn R. Parker and Roger H. Davidson, “Why Do Americans Love Their Congressmen So Much More than Their Congress?” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 4 (1979), pp. 53–61.
 18. Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek, *Congress and Its Members* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1994), p. 149.
 19. “GOP’s House-Cleaning Sweep Changes Rules, Cuts Groups,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 52 (December 10, 1994), p. 3487.
 20. Ibid.
 21. Mayhew, “Case of the Vanishing Marginals,” p. 311.
 22. John A. Ferejohn, “On the Decline of Competition in Congressional Elections,” *American Political Science Review* 71 (1977), p. 174.
 23. Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics On Congress 1995–1996* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1995), tables 5-3 and 5-4.

24. Fiorina, "Case of the Vanishing Marginals," p. 180.
25. Glenn R. Parker and Suzanne L. Parker, "The Correlates and Effects of Attention to District by U.S. House Members," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 10 (1985), p. 239.
26. Paul Feldman and James Jondrow, "Congressional Elections and Local Federal Spending," *American Journal of Political Science* 28 (1984), p. 152; Patrick Sellers, "Fiscal Consistency and Federal District Spending in Congressional Elections" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 14–16, 1994); Robert Stein and Kenneth N. Bickers, "The Electoral Dynamics of the Federal Pork Barrel" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, September 1–4, 1994.)
27. See John R. Johannes and John C. McAdams, "The Congressional Incumbency Effect: Is It Casework, Policy Compatibility, or Something Else?"; Morris P. Fiorina, "Some Problems in Studying the Effects of Resource Allocation in Congressional Elections"; Diana Evans Yiannakis, "The Grateful Electorate: Casework and Congressional Elections", and John C. McAdams and John R. Johannes, "Does Casework Matter? A Reply to Professor Fiorina," all in *American Journal of Political Science* 25 (1981), pp. 512–604; Lynda W. Powell, "Constituency Service and Electoral Margin in Congress" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Denver, September 2–5, 1982); John R. Johannes and John McAdams, "The Effect of Congressional Casework on Elections" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, August 29–September 1, 1985); Albert C. Cover and Bruce S. Brumberg, "Baby Books and Ballots: The Impact of Congressional Mail on Constituent Opinion," *American Political Science Review* 76 (1982), pp. 347–359; John R. Johannes, *To Serve the People: Congress and Constituency Service* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Morris P. Fiorina and Douglas Rivers, "Constituency Service, Reputation, and the Incumbency Advantage," in *Members of Congress at Home and In Washington*, ed. Morris P. Fiorina and David Rohde (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming); George Serra and Albert D. Cover, "The Electoral Consequences of Perquisite Use: The Casework Case," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 17 (1992), pp. 233–246; George Serra, "What's in It For Me? The Impact of Congressional Casework on Incumbent Evaluation," *American Politics Quarterly* 22 (1994), pp. 403–420.
28. Morris P. Fiorina, *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 94–97; Fiorina, "Resource Allocation in Congressional Elections," pp. 545–550.
29. Morris P. Fiorina, "The Incumbency Factor," *Public Opinion* (September–October, 1978), pp. 42–44.
30. Parker and Parker, "Attention to District by U.S. House Members," p. 229; see also Glenn R. Parker, *Homeward Bound: Explaining Changes in Congressional Behavior* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986).
31. Charles M. Tidmarch, "The Second Time Around: Freshman Democratic House Members' 1976 Reelection Experiences" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 1–4, 1977), p. 27.
32. Jacobson, *Divided Government*, pp. 15–19, 56–57.
33. Gary C. Jacobson and Samuel Kernell, *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections*, 2d ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1983), chapter 3; Bruce W. Robeck, "State Legislator Candidates for the U.S. House: Prospects for Success," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 7 (1982), pp. 511–512; Thomas A. Kazee, "Ambition and Candidacy: Running as a Strategic Calculation," in *Who Runs for Congress? Ambition, Con-*

- text, and Candidate Emergence*, ed. Thomas A. Kazee (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1994), pp. 171–177; L. Sandy Maisel and Walter P. Stone, "Competition in Congressional Elections: Determinants of Candidate Emergence" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, September 1–4, 1994).
34. For additional evidence of strategic behavior among potential challengers, see Jon R. Bond, Cary Covington, and Richard Fleisher, "Explaining Challenger Quality in Congressional Elections," *Journal of Politics* 47 (1985), p. 523; William T. Bianco, "Strategic Decisions on Candidacy in U.S. Congressional Districts," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 9 (1984), p. 360; Gary C. Jacobson, "Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of U.S. House Elections, 1946–1986," *American Political Science Review* 83 (1989), pp. 773–793; David Lublin, "Quality, Not Quantity: Strategic Politicians in U.S. Senate Elections," *Journal of Politics* 56 (1994), pp. 228–241. Candidates who have held elective office are not the only high-quality challengers, to be sure; some "ambitious amateurs" are equally effective and equally strategic in their behavior. See David T. Canon, *Actors, Athletes, and Astronauts: Political Amateurs in the United States Congress* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
 35. Gary C. Jacobson, *Money in Congressional Elections* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 72–101.
 36. Gary W. Cox and Jonathan Katz, "Why Did the Incumbency Advantage in U.S. House Elections Grow?" *Journal of Politics* 40 (1996), in press.
 37. Brady, Gaines, and Rivers, "Incumbency Advantage," p. 14.
 38. Jacobson, *Money in Congressional Elections*, pp. 136–145; Gary C. Jacobson, "Money and Votes Reconsidered: Congressional Elections, 1972–1982," *Public Choice* 47(1985), pp. 16–40; Gary C. Jacobson, "Enough Is Too Much: Money and Competition in House Elections, 1972–1984," *Elections in America*, ed. Kay L. Schlozman (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 173–195; Gary C. Jacobson, "The Effects of Campaigning in House Elections: New Evidence for Old Arguments," *American Journal of Political Science* 34 (1990), pp. 334–362. For the contrary argument that incumbent spending has powerful effects, see Donald P. Green and Jonathan S. Krasno, "Salvation for the Spendthrift Incumbent: Reestimating the Effects of Campaign Spending in House Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 32 (1988), pp. 884–907, and Donald P. Green and Jonathan S. Krasno, "Rebuttal to Jacobson's 'New Evidence for Old Arguments,'" *American Journal of Political Science* 34 (1990), pp. 363–372.
 39. Jacobson, *Money in Congressional Elections*, pp. 136–146; Alan I. Abramowitz, "Incumbency, Campaign Spending, and the Decline of Competition in U.S. House Elections," *Journal of Politics* 53 (1991), pp. 34–56; Stephen Ansolabehere and Alan Gerber, "The Mismeasure of Campaign Spending: Evidence from the 1990 U.S. House Elections," *Journal of Politics* 56 (1994), pp. 1106–1118. Ansolabehere and Gerber show that the result holds if only money spent directly on campaign communications is measured as spending, although the coefficient on communications spending is naturally larger than the coefficient on total spending in their model.
 40. Alan I. Abramowitz, "Explaining Senate Election Outcomes," *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): pp. 385–403; Jacobson, *Money in Congressional Elections*, pp. 152–155.
 41. Ibid.; Green and Krasno, "Effects of Campaign Spending."
 42. Robert S. Erikson and Thomas Palfrey, "Campaign Spending and Incumbency: An Alternative Simultaneous Equation Approach" (manuscript, 1995); Robert K. Goodel and Donald A. Gross, "A Systems Approach to Campaign Finance in U.S. House Elections." *American Politics Quarterly* 22 (1994), pp. 125–153; Christopher Kenny and Michael

- McBurnett, "An Individual Level Multiequation Model of Expenditure Effects in Contested House Elections," *American Political Science Review* 88 (1994), pp. 669-707.
43. Losing House incumbents in 1992 and 1994 spent an average of \$928,000; the median was \$875,756; 81 percent spent more than \$600,000.
 44. Jacobson, "Money and Votes Reconsidered."
 45. Or so politicians think. One empirical study found that district attention, variously measured, had no discernible effect on the quality of the challenger or the money spent against the incumbent; see Bond, Covington, and Fleisher, "Challenger Quality in Congressional Elections," p. 523. But this study is subject to the same doubts raised about negative findings in other studies of the effects of district attention, discussed earlier.
 46. Quoted in Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), p. 13.
 47. *Ibid.*, chapter 6.
 48. See Robeck, "State Legislator Candidates," p. 511; Harvey L. Schantz, "Contested and Uncontested Primaries for the U.S. House," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 5 (1980), p. 550; and David T. Canon, "Contesting Primaries in Congressional Elections: 1972-1988" (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the *American Political Science Association*, Atlanta, August 31-September 3, 1989), p. 14.
 49. For example, here is Martin Franks, executive director of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, on why first-termers head the Democrats' target list: "The best chance of getting them is now. Every day they are here they become harder to unseat." Quoted in David Kaplan, "Freshmen Find It Easier to Run as Incumbents," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 43 (November 2, 1985), p. 2225.
 50. Mayhew, *Congress*, p. 37.
 51. See, for example, the story of how Fred Eckert, a first-term incumbent Republican, managed to lose a Republican district in upstate New York; Linda L. Fowler and Robert D. McClure, *Political Ambition: Who Decides to Run for Congress?* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989).
 52. David A. Leuthold, *Electioneering in a Democracy: Campaigns for Congress* (New York: John Wiley, 1968), p. 22.
 53. L. Sandy Maisel, *From Obscurity to Oblivion: Running in the Congressional Primary* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), p. 23.
 54. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
 55. *Ibid.*, table 2.2; see also Fowler and McClure, *Political Ambition*, p. 68.
 56. Jeffrey S. Banks and D. Roderick Kiewiet, "Explaining Patterns of Candidate Competition in Congressional Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 33 (1989), pp. 997-1015. For a contrary view, see David C. Canon, "Sacrificial Lambs or Strategic Politicians? Political Amateurs in U.S. House Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (1993), pp. 1119-1141.
 57. "Rhode Island—1st District," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 46 (December 31, 1988), p. 3618.
 58. Robert J. Huckshorn and Robert C. Spencer, *The Politics of Defeat* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971) p. 75.
 59. See John F. Bibby, "The Case of the Young Old Pro: The Sixth District of Wisconsin," in Clem, *Making of Congressmen*, p. 216, for an example.
 60. "Campaign Crusaders Air Graphic Anti-Abortion Ads," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 50 (September 26, 1992), pp. 2970-2971.
 61. I have found this to be the case in research examining the backgrounds of House challengers' postwar elections.
 62. Canon, *Actors, Athletes, and Astronauts*, pp. 38-39.