
Fundamental Factors in General Elections

Session 9

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MIT Department of Political Science
17.263: American Elections

Roadmap

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News of the Day

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PRESIDENT'S TAXES CHART CHRONIC LOSSES, AUDIT BATTLE AND INCOME TAX AVOIDANCE

Ransomware May Threaten Election Night

Officials Fear Hackers Will Sow Chaos

By NICOLE PERLROTH
and DAVID E. SANGER

A Texas company that sells software that cities and states use to display results on election night was hit by ransomware last week, the latest of nearly a thousand such attacks over the past year against small towns, big cities and the contractors who run their vot-



President Trump paid no U.S. income tax for much of the past two decades.

Tax returns that the president fought to keep secret and were examined by The New York Times cast a harsh light on his finances. He regularly reported losing far more than he made, allowing him to reduce his federal income tax bill many years to zero. The year he became president, he paid \$750.



YEARS OF TRUMP RECORDS

Long-Concealed Returns Point to Looming Financial Threats and Direct Conflicts of Interest

This article is by Russ Buettner, Susanne Craig and Mike McIntire.

Donald J. Trump paid \$750 in federal income taxes the year he won the presidency. In his first year in the White House, he paid another \$750.

He had paid no income taxes at all in 10 of the previous 15 years — largely because he reported losing much more money than he made.

As the president wages a re-election campaign that polls say he is in danger of losing, his finances are under stress, beset by losses and hundreds of

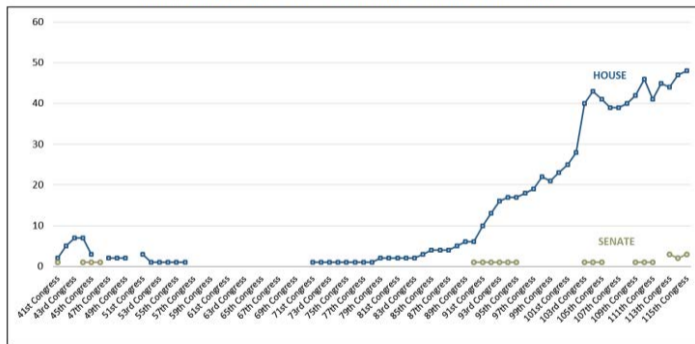
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Diversifying the Political Class

Black Members of Congress, 1870–present

Figure 1. Number of African Americans in Each Congress, 1870 to Present

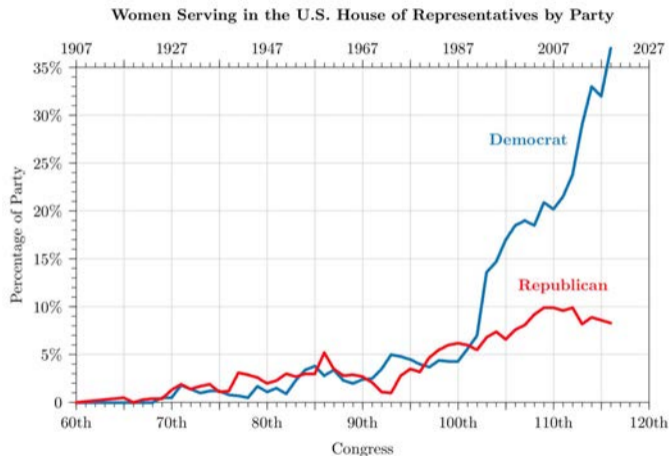
Including any Members who served only a portion of the Congress



Source: U.S. Congress, House, Office of the Historian and Office of Art and Archives, "Black Americans in Congress," <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Black-Americans-in-Congress/>.

Burdick, Ira A., and Jennifer E. Manning. In *African American Members of the United States Congress: 1870-2018*. Congressional Research Service, 2018. This work is in the public domain.

Female Members of Congress



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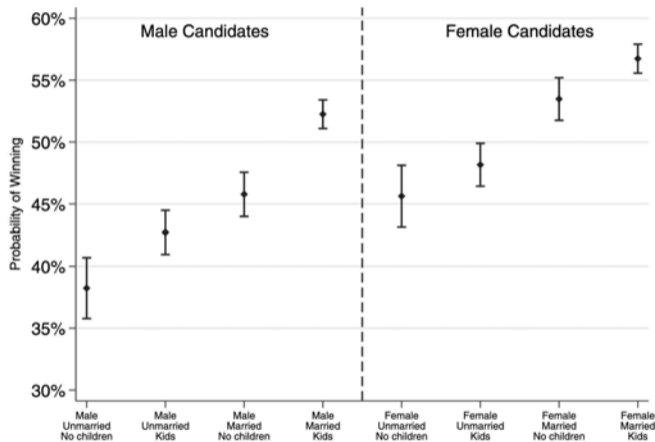
Candidates and Democratic Choice

In her Persuall comments on Carnes (2014), Kade Bose made the astute point that one reason working-class citizens are underrepresented is that

voters may be able to remove officials who don't represent them, but the available replacements most likely will take a more similar stance as the official they replaced.

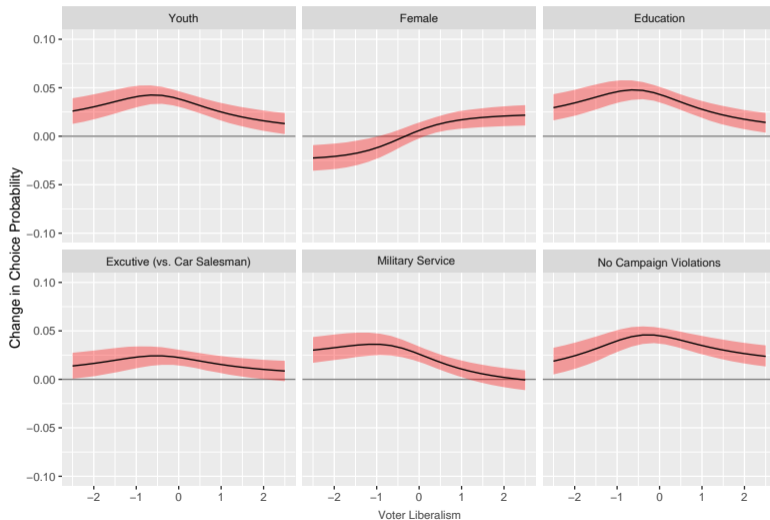
This highlights the more general point that voters' ability to select representatives depends on the **pool** of candidates who run in the first place. If certain types are in short supply, then voters' choices will be artificially limited.

The Double Blind for Women (Teele et al. 2018)



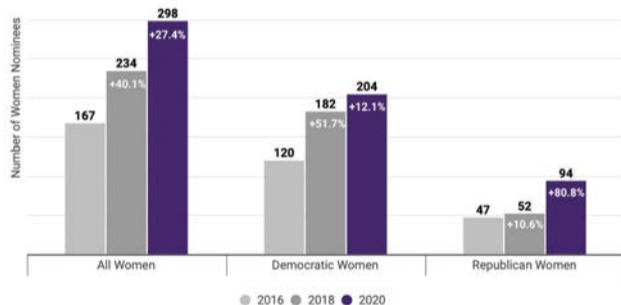
Teele, Dawn Langan, Joshua Kalla, and Frances Rosenbluth. In "The Ties That Double Bind: Social Roles and Women's Underrepresentation in Politics." *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 3 (2018): 525–41. © Cambridge University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Gender Preferences Depend on Voter's Ideology



A Democratic Wave, a Republican Echo?

Women Nominees for U.S. House
2016, 2018, and 2020



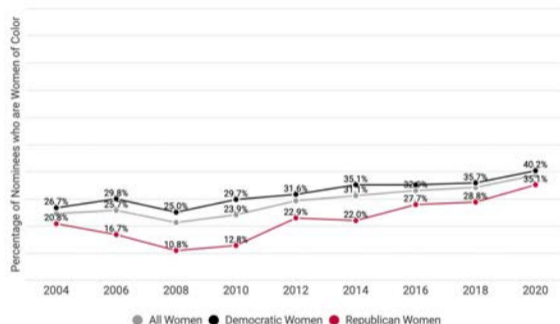
Counts include only major-party nominees and do not include nominees for non-voting positions in the U.S. House. Nominees will be determined in Louisiana on November 3, 2020. Percentages reflect the percentage increase in women's nominations between from the previous election year (column to the left).

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The Intersection of Race and Gender

Women of Color as a Percentage of All Women Nominees for U.S. House by Party, 2004-2020



Counts include only major-party nominees and do not include nominees for non-voting positions in the U.S. House. Nominees will be determined in Louisiana on November 3, 2020. Race data relies on candidate self-identification. Women nominees for whom race identification was unavailable ranges from 0 to 4 cases in this time period. Those nominees are included to count percentage of total.

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Breakout: Brainstorming Reforms

Relying on evidence from the readings, brainstorm ways to increase the representativeness of the candidate pool in American elections.

Fundamentals and Patterns

Beyond Partisan Realignment

- ▶ A few sessions ago we discussed **realignment theory** as a way of organizing American political history.
 - ▶ Stable **party systems** defined by distinct party **coalitions**, separated by once-a-generation **critical elections**: 1828, 1860, 1896, 1932, . . .
- ▶ Though useful, encompassing frameworks like realignment can obscure alternative patterns while also making history seem more predictable than it is.
- ▶ In reality, American elections are shaped by **multiple intersecting logics**, some that enforce stability and others that undermine it, and unpredictable **events** can play a huge role.

The Economy

- ▶ In all democracies, the state of the economy is usually the most important electoral “fundamental.”
- ▶ Primarily **retrospective** and **sociotropic**
- ▶ **Incumbent** party (of president) held **accountable**: rewarded for good times and punished for bad.
- ▶ Economic crises often lead to big changes:
 - ▶ 1780s → constitutional convention
 - ▶ 1837 → first unified Whig government
 - ▶ 1873 → Democratic takeover and demise of Reconstruction
 - ▶ 1929 → New Deal Realignment and Democratic dominance
 - ▶ 1980 → Reagan Revolution and conservative ascendancy
 - ▶ 2008 → Obama and Democratic supermajority in Congress

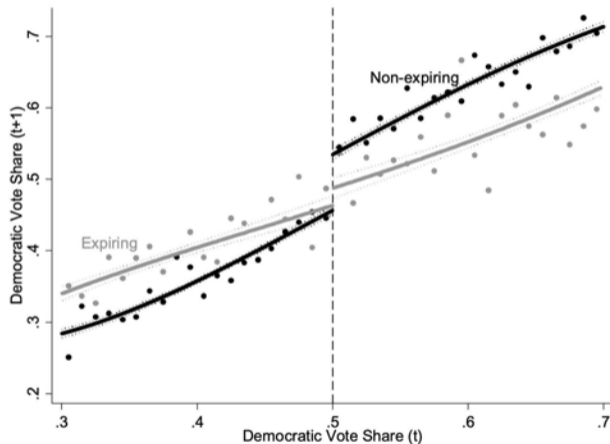
National Security

- ▶ National security crises are less regular than economic ones and less predictable in their effects, but can be just as important.
- ▶ Opposition party often hurt in short run (“rally around the flag”):
 - ▶ War of 1812 and the opposition Federalists
 - ▶ Mexican-American War and the opposition Whigs
 - ▶ Both world wars and the opposition Republicans
 - ▶ September 11th and the opposition Democrats
- ▶ But incumbent presidents are **blamed** if things go poorly:
 - ▶ Wilson and the aftermath of WWI
 - ▶ LBJ and Vietnam
 - ▶ Carter and the Iran Hostage Crisis
 - ▶ Bush II and the Iraq War

The Incumbency Advantage

- ▶ When it comes to individual offices, one strong regularity is the personal **incumbency advantage**: if the current occupant of the office runs for reelection, s/he is likely to win.
- ▶ This advantage best known for U.S. House members, but it exists for nearly all offices in the United States, including the president.
 - ▶ The president's party has won 2/3 of the time when the incumbent has run for reelection, but about 1/2 of other elections.
- ▶ As this suggests, the incumbency advantage is primarily **personal**, not partisan.

Legislative Term Limits and the Incumbency Advantage



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Short-Term Equilibration

Although the incumbency advantage can give one party a structural advantage in individual seats and to a lesser degree in Congress as a whole, there is also strong **negative feedback** in elections.

- ▶ Thermostatic response and policy blowback
- ▶ Midterm loss and partisan balancing
- ▶ Strong incentives for losers to adapt in search of winning strategies

Long-Term Parity

As a consequence, neither party has enjoyed a long-run advantage.

- ▶ Since 1828, Democrats have earned almost exactly half of votes for U.S. House and president, winning the latter 22 of 48 times.
- ▶ Due to adaptation, large demographic advantages almost never materialize, let alone persist (e.g., “emerging” Democratic majority).

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