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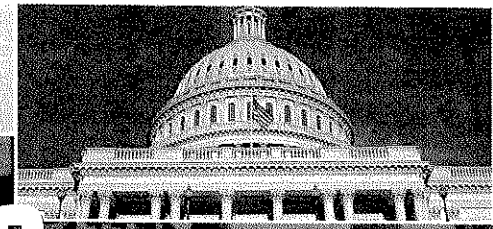
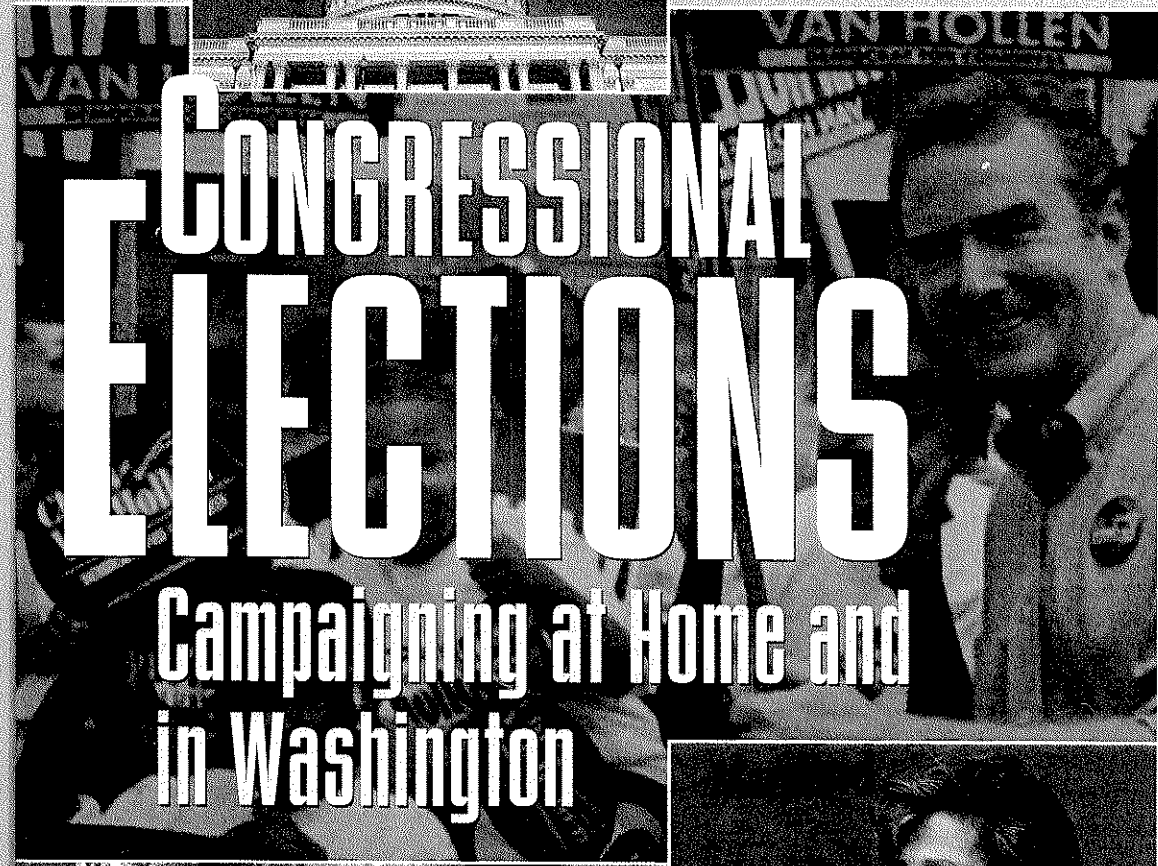
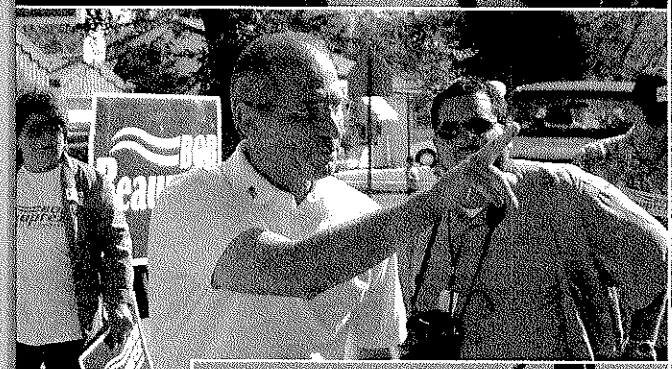
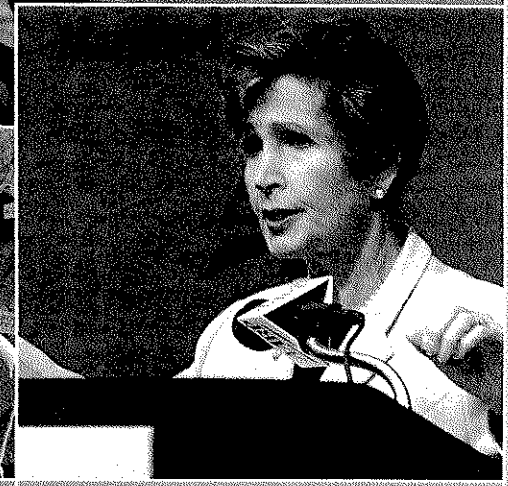


Congressional Elections

Campaigning at Home and in Washington







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In Memory of
Harry Perlman

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Preface

Each congressional election cycle unveils both continuities and changes in the way congressional campaigns are conducted. Writing this new edition of *Congressional Elections* gave me the opportunity not only to analyze in depth the 2002 House and Senate campaigns and election outcomes but also to assess the far-reaching changes that have taken place in recent years. Although just a few years have gone by since publication of the third edition, congressional elections and the context in which they are waged continue to evolve in ways that are both major and minor, predictable and surprising. It has been my challenge to show how these developments affect an enduring but imperfect election system.

The significance of independent, parallel, and coordinated campaigns as important new components of competitive House and Senate elections cannot be overstated. These party- and interest group–sponsored campaigns comprise massive, broad-based efforts in election agenda setting, television and radio issue advocacy advertisements, direct mail and mass telephone calls, and grassroots mobilization, most of which are financed with soft money. The level of planning and resources dedicated to these campaigns is unsurpassed by previous election cycles.

Another set of changes involves the increasing complexity of interest group participation. In addition to political action committees (PACs), groups have created a veritable alphabet soup of legal entities for the purpose of carrying out a variety of political functions designed to influence elections. PACs, 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations, and 527 committees—defined by different provisions of federal law—offer different organizational advantages such as the ability to contribute directly to congressional campaigns, to collect tax-deductible donations, to claim tax-exempt status, or to raise and spend soft money.

CHAPTER ONE

The Strategic Context

Congressional elections, and elections in the United States in general, are centered more on the candidates than are elections in other modern industrialized democracies. In this chapter I discuss the candidate-centered U.S. election system and explain how the Constitution, election laws, and the political parties form the system's institutional framework. I also explain how the nation's political culture and recent developments in technology have helped this system flourish.

Also covered is the influence of the political setting in a given election year on electoral competition and turnover in Congress. The political setting includes some predictable factors such as the decennial redrawing of House districts; some highly likely occurrences such as the wide-scale reelection of incumbents; and transient, less predictable phenomena such as congressional scandals and acts of terrorism. These features of the political setting affect the expectations and behavior of potential congressional candidates, the individuals who actually run for Congress, political contributors, and voters.

THE CANDIDATE-CENTERED CAMPAIGN

Candidates, not political parties, are the major focus of congressional campaigns, and candidates, not parties, bear the ultimate responsibility for election outcomes. These characteristics of congressional elections are striking when viewed from a comparative perspective. In most democracies, political parties are the principal contestants in elections, and campaigns focus on national issues, ideology, and party programs and accomplishments. In the United States, parties do not run congressional campaigns nor do they become the major

focus of elections. Instead, candidates run their own campaigns, and parties contribute money or election services to some of them. Parties also may advertise or mobilize voters on behalf of candidates. A comparison of the terminology commonly used to describe elections in the United States with that used in Great Britain more than hints at the differences. In the United States, candidates are said to *run* for Congress, and they do so with or without party help. In Britain, by contrast, candidates are said to *stand* for election to Parliament, and their party runs most of the campaign. The difference in terminology only slightly oversimplifies reality.

Unlike candidates for national legislatures in most other democracies, U.S. congressional candidates are self-selected rather than recruited by party organizations.[1] They must win the right to run under their party's label through a participatory primary, caucus, or convention, or by scaring off all opposition. Only after they have secured their party's nomination are major-party candidates assured a place on the general election ballot. Until then, few candidates receive significant party assistance. Independent and minor-party candidates can get on the ballot in other ways, usually by paying a registration fee or collecting several thousand signatures from district residents.

The nomination process in most other countries, alternatively, begins with a small group of party activists pursuing the nomination through a "closed" process that allows only formal, dues-paying party members to select the candidate.[2] Whereas the American system amplifies the input of primary voters, and in a few states caucus participants, these other systems respond more to the input of local party members and place more emphasis on peer review.

The need to win a party nomination forces congressional candidates to assemble their own campaign organizations, formulate their own election strategies, and conduct their own campaigns. The images and issues they convey to voters in trying to win the nomination carry over to the general election. The efforts of individual candidates and their campaign organizations typically have a larger impact on election outcomes than do the activities of party organizations and other groups.

The candidate-centered nature of congressional elections has evolved in recent years as parties and interest groups have developed so-called issue advocacy advertisements and worked to mobilize voters in competitive races. However, the basic structure of the system remains intact. That structure has a major impact on virtually every aspect of campaigning, including who decides to run, the kinds of election strategies the candidates employ, and the resources available to them. It affects the decisions and activities of party organizations, political action committees (PACs), other interest groups, and journalists. It also has

a major influence on how citizens make their voting decisions and on the activities that successful candidates carry out once they are elected to Congress. Finally, the candidate-centered nature of the congressional election system affects the election reforms that those in power are willing to consider.

THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

In designing a government to prevent the majority from depriving the minority of its rights, the framers of the Constitution created a system of checks and balances to prevent any one official or element of society from amassing too much power. Three key features of the framers' blueprint have profoundly influenced congressional elections: the separation of powers, bicameralism, and federalism. These aspects of the Constitution require that candidates for the House of Representatives, Senate, and presidency be chosen by different methods and constituencies. House members were and continue to be elected directly by the people. Senators were originally chosen by their state legislatures but have been selected in statewide elections since the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913. Presidents have always been selected through the electoral college. The means for filling state and local offices were omitted from the Constitution, but candidates for these positions were and continue to be elected independently of members of Congress.

Holding elections for individual offices separates the political fortunes of members of Congress from one another and from other officials. A candidate for the House can win during an election year in which his or her party suffers a landslide defeat in the race for the presidency; experiences severe losses in the House or Senate; or finds itself surrendering its hold over neighboring congressional districts, the state legislature, the governor's mansion, and various local offices. The system encourages House, Senate, state, and local candidates to communicate issues and themes that they perceive to be popular in their districts even when these messages differ from those advocated by their party's leader. The system does little to encourage teamwork in campaigning or governance. In 2002 most GOP candidates distanced themselves from President George W. Bush's proposal to privatize part of the Social Security system. Such an act would be labeled party disloyalty and considered unacceptable under a parliamentary system of government with its party-focused elections, but it is entirely consistent with the expectations of the Constitution's framers. As James Madison wrote in *Federalist* no. 46,

> A local spirit will infallibly prevail. . .in the members of Congress. . . . Measures will too often be decided according to their probable effect, not on the national prosperity and happiness, but on the prejudices, interests, and pursuits of the governments and people of the individual States.

When congressional candidates differ from their party's presidential nominee or national platform on major issues, they seek political cover not only from the Constitution but also from state party platforms, local election manifestos, or fellow party members who have taken similar positions.

Of course, congressional candidates usually adopt issue positions held by other party candidates for the House, Senate, or presidency. In 1932 most Democrats embraced Franklin D. Roosevelt's call for an activist government to battle the Great Depression. In 2002 many Republican candidates followed the advice of White House senior advisor Karl Rove and made the war on terrorism and national security key components of their campaigns. Democratic candidates, many of whom had hoped to focus on the nation's ailing economy, were encouraged by their party's leadership to support the war on terrorism following the attacks of September 11. Democratic leaders also recommended that they discuss both national security and economic security and blame the president's domestic policies for the nation's economic doldrums.

Federal and state laws further contribute to the candidate-centered nature of congressional elections. Originally, federal law regulated few aspects of congressional elections, designating only the number of representatives a state was entitled to elect. States held congressional elections at different times, used different methods of election, and set different qualifications for voters. Some states used multimember at-large districts, a practice that awarded each party a share of congressional seats proportional to its share of the statewide popular vote; others elected their House members in odd years, which minimized the ability of presidential candidates to pull House candidates of their own party into office on their coattails. The financing of congressional campaigns also went virtually unregulated for most of the nation's history.

Over the years, Congress and the states passed legislation governing the election of House members that further reinforced the candidate-centered nature of congressional elections at the expense of parties. The creation of geographically defined, single-member, winner-take-all congressional districts was particularly important in this regard. These districts, which were mandated by the Apportionment Act of 1842, encouraged individual candidates to build locally based coalitions. Such districts gave no rewards to candidates who came in second, even if their party performed well throughout the state or in neighboring districts.[3] Thus, candidates of the same party had little incentive to work together or to run a party-focused campaign. Under the multimember district or general ticket systems that existed in some states prior to the

act—and that continue to be used in most European nations, members of parties that finish lower than first place may receive seats in the legislature. Candidates have strong incentives to run cooperative, party-focused campaigns under these systems because their electoral fortunes are bound together.

The timing of congressional elections also helps to produce a candidate-centered system. Because the dates are fixed, with House elections scheduled biennially and roughly one-third of the Senate up for election every two years, many elections are held when there is no burning issue on the national agenda. Without a salient national issue to capture the voters' attention, House and Senate candidates base their campaigns on local issues or on their personal qualifications for holding office. Incumbents stress their experience, the services they provide to constituents, or seniority. Challengers, on the other hand, attack their opponents for casting congressional roll-call votes that are out of sync with the views of local voters, for pandering to special interests, or for "being part of the problem in Washington." Open-seat races focus mainly on local issues, the candidates' political experience, or character issues.

In contrast, systems that do not have fixed election dates, including most of those in western Europe, tend to hold elections that are more national in focus and centered on political parties. The rules regulating national elections in those systems require that elections be held within a set time frame, but the exact date is left open. Elections may be called by the party in power at a time of relative prosperity, when it is confident that it can maintain or enlarge its parliamentary majority. Elections also may be called when a burning issue divides the nation and the party in power is forced to call a snap election because its members in parliament are unable to agree on a policy for dealing with the crisis. In contrast to congressional elections, which are often referenda on the performance of individual officeholders and their abilities to meet local concerns, these elections focus on national conditions and the performance of the party in power.

Because the boundaries of congressional districts rarely match those for statewide or local offices and because terms for the House, the Senate, and many state and local offices differ from one another, a party's candidates often lack incentives to work together. House candidates consider the performance of their party's candidates statewide or in neighboring districts to be a secondary concern, just as the election of House candidates is usually not of primary importance to candidates for state or local office. Differences in election boundaries and timing also encourage a sense of parochialism in party officials similar to that of their candidates. Cooperation among party organizations can be achieved only by persuading local, state, and national party leaders that it is in their mutual best interest. Cooperation is often heightened during

elections that precede or follow the decennial taking of the census, when politicians at all levels of government focus on the imminent redrawing of election districts or on preserving or wresting control of new districts or those that have been significantly altered.

Although the seeds for candidate-centered congressional election campaigns were sown by the Constitution and election laws, not until the middle of the twentieth century did the candidate-centered system firmly take root. Prior to the emergence of this system, during a period often called the "golden age" of political parties, party organizations played a major role in most election campaigns, including many campaigns for Congress. Local party organizations, often referred to as old-fashioned political machines, had control over the nomination process, possessed a near monopoly over the resources needed to organize the electorate, and provided the symbolic cues that informed the electoral decisions of most voters.[4] The key to their success was their ability to command the loyalties of large numbers of individuals, many of whom were able to persuade friends and neighbors to support their party's candidates. Not until the demise of the old-fashioned machine and the emergence of new campaign technology did the modern candidate-centered system finally blossom.

Reforms intended to weaken political machines played a major role in the development of the candidate-centered system. One such reform was the adoption of the Australian ballot by roughly three-quarters of the states between 1888 and 1896.[5] This government-printed ballot listed every candidate for each office and allowed individuals to cast their votes in secret, away from the prying eyes of party officials. The Australian ballot replaced a system of voting in which each party supplied supporters with its own easily identifiable ballot that included only the names of the party's candidates. The Australian ballot, by ensuring secrecy and simplifying split-ticket voting, made it easy for citizens to focus on candidates rather than parties when voting. This type of ballot remains in use today.

State-regulated primary nominating contests, which were widely adopted during the Progressive movement of the early 1900s, deprived party leaders of the power to handpick congressional nominees and gave that power to voters who participated in their party's nominating election.[6] The merit-based civil service system, another progressive reform, deprived the parties of patronage. No longer able to distribute government jobs or contracts, the parties had difficulty maintaining large corps of campaign workers.[7] Issues, friendships, the excitement of politics, and other noneconomic incentives could motivate small numbers of people to become active in party politics, but they could not motivate enough people to support a party-focused system of congressional elections.

Congressional candidates also lacked the patronage or government contracts needed to attract large numbers of volunteer workers or to persuade other candidates to help them with their campaigns. By the mid-twentieth century the "isolation" of congressional candidates from one another and from their own party organizations was so complete that a major report on the state of political parties characterized congressional candidates as the "orphans of the political system." The report, published by the American Political Science Association's Committee on Political Parties, went on to point out that congressional candidates "had no truly adequate party mechanism available for the conduct of their campaigns,. . .enjoy[ed] remarkably little national or local support, [and] have mostly been left to cope with the political hazards of their occupation on their own." [8]

Voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives and redistricting were about the only areas of election politics in which there was, and remains, extensive cooperation among groups of candidates and party committees. But even here the integration of different party committees and candidate organizations—and especially those involved in congressional elections—was and continues to be short of that exhibited in other democracies.

The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 and the amendments, regulatory rulings, and court decisions that have shaped federal campaign finance law (collectively known as the FECA) further reinforced the pattern of candidate-centered congressional elections.[9] The original 1974 law placed strict limits on the amount of money parties could contribute to or spend in coordination with their congressional candidates' campaigns. Many of these limits remained in place in 2002 (see Table 1-1). The FECA further limited the parties' involvement in congressional elections by placing ceilings on individual contributions and an outright ban on corporate, union, and trade association contributions to the accounts the parties use to contribute to or expressly advocate the election or defeat of federal candidates (see Table 1-2). Moreover, the FECA provided no subsidies for generic, party-focused campaign activity.[10]

The law's provisions for political parties stand in marked contrast to the treatment given to parties in other democracies. Most of these countries provide subsidies to parties for campaign and interelection activities.[11] The United States is the only democracy in which parties are not given free television and radio time.[12] The support that other democracies give to parties is consistent with the central role they play in elections, government, and society, just as the lack of assistance afforded to American parties is consistent with the candidate-centered system that has developed in the United States.

Lacking independent sources of revenue, local party organizations are unable to play a dominant role in the modern cash-based system of congressional campaign politics.[13] The national and state party committees that survived the reform movements and changes in federal election laws lack sufficient funds or staff to dominate campaign politics. Perhaps even more important, party leaders have little desire to do so in most cases. For the most part, they believe a party should bolster its candidates' campaigns, not replace them with a campaign of its own.[14]

Nevertheless, the evolution of campaign finance law has enabled parties to play a greater role in recent congressional elections. The 1979 amendment to the FECA exempted from federal contribution and spending limits voter registration drives, get-out-the vote efforts, and other grassroots activities sponsored by state and local party committees. It also allowed these organizations to distribute slate cards and other materials that list federal candidates without reporting these activities to the Federal Election Commission (FEC). The amendment, combined with various FEC rulings and court decisions, created a legal loophole that permits campaign spending that is technically outside of the federal campaign finance system but is used to influence the outcome of federal elections. The funds that flow through this loophole, commonly referred to as "nonfederal," "soft," or "outside" money (as opposed to the "federal," or "hard," money spent inside the system), include contributions to parties that come from sources and in amounts banned under the federal system. Some soft money contributions are collected from corporations, unions, and wealthy individuals in amounts in excess of $1 million.[15]

Most soft money is raised and spent by political parties, but other groups, some of which are closely affiliated with party committees, also collect and distribute money outside the federal system in order to influence federal elections. National party soft money expenditures surpassed $509.6 million during the 2002 contests, setting a new record for either a midterm or presidential election year.[16] The outside spending of interest groups cannot be accounted for fully because it does not have to be reported to the FEC; however, it is estimated that groups spent in excess of $20 million on television alone in the 2002 elections.[17] Groups spent millions of additional dollars on voter identification, direct mail, mass telephone calls, and other communications and voter mobilization activities.

Another change in the campaign finance system that has increased the role of interest groups and party-affiliated organizations in elections concerns the use of funds collected by tax-exempt organizations for political use. These groups, classified as 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), and 527 committees in the federal tax code, do not pay taxes because they purportedly exist for charitable, educational, or other civic purposes rather than to earn profits. In recent years, however, some tax-exempt groups have carried out activities financed with soft money to influence congressional and other elections. Among these groups are the Club for Growth, an anti-tax group that supports Republican candidates who favor free-market

TABLE 1-1

Campaign Contribution and Spending Limits in the 2002 Congressional Elections under the FECA

	Hard money					Soft money
	Contributions		Coordinated expenditures		Independent expenditures	Issue advocacy and other expenditures
	To a House candidate	To a Senate candidate	On behalf of a House candidate	On behalf of a Senate candidate	To expressly help or harm a candidate	To help or harm a candidate without expressly advocating the candidate's defeat
Individuals	$1,000	$1,000	Prohibited	Prohibited	No limit	No limit
Political action committees (PACs)	$5,000	$5,000	Prohibited	Prohibited	No limit	No limit
Corporations, unions, trade associations, and other groups	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited except by qualified nonprofit organizations	No limit
Party congressional campaign committees	$5,000	Can make a portion of another party committee's coordinated expenditures	$10,000 (adjusted for inflation)	Can make a portion of another party committee's coordinated expenditures	No limit	Must be allocated in proportion to hard money expenditures in a given state
Party senatorial campaign committees	$5,000	$17,500	Can make a portion of another party committee's coordinated expenditures	2¢ per voter for Senate candidates (adjusted for inflation)	No limit	Must be allocated in proportion to hard money expenditures in a given state
Party national committees	$5,000	Can make a portion of another party committee's contributions	Can make a porton of another party committee's coordinated expenditures	Can make a portion of another party committee's coordinated expenditures	No limit	Must be allocated in proportion to hard money expenditures in a given state
State and local party committees	$5,000	$5,000	$10,000 (adjusted for inflation)	2¢ per voter for Senate candidates (adjusted for inflation)	No limit	Must be allocated in proportion to hard money expenditures in a given state

Notes: Individuals and PACs can make the maximum contribution in each stage of the election (primary, runoff, and general election). The same is true of party committees' contributions in House races, but the committees rarely contribute to primary or runoff candidates. The senatorial campaign committees can contribute a total of $17,500 per Senate candidate in all three stages of the election. PACs must have been registered for at least six months, received contributions from more than fifty contributors, and made contributions to at least five federal candidates. Otherwise, they are subject to the same limits as those imposed on individual contributors. Corporations, labor unions, and federal government contractors are prohibited from making independent expenditures, but qualified nonprofit social welfare organizations that do not engage in business activities and have no shareholders other than employees or creditors can make independent expenditures. The limits for coordinated expenditures made on behalf of House candidates in states with only one House seat are twice the normal amount. A party committee can make agency agreements allowing other party organizations to make some or all of its coordinated expenditures. National party soft money expenditures cannot exceed 35 percent of the total party expenditures in presidential election years and 40 percent of the total party expenditures in midterm election years. The limits for state and local party soft money expenditures vary according to the composition of a state's ballot. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, now under judicial review, has changed some aspects of the law. See this book's accompanying web site (http://herrnson.cqpress.com) for details on how court rulings have altered contribution and spending rules.

TABLE 1-2

Annual Federal Contribution Limits for Individuals, Party Committees, PACs, and Other Interest Groups in 2002 under the FECA

	Hard money contributions				Soft money contributions			
	To national party committees	To state party committees	To political action committees	Total annual contributions	To a House or Senate candidate	To national party committees	To state party committees	Total annual contributions
Individuals	$20,000	$5,000	$5,000	$25,000	Prohibited	No limit	Subject to state law	No limit
Political action committees	$15,000	$5,000	$5,000	No limit	Prohibited	No limit	Subject to state law	No limit
Corporations, unions, trade associations, and other groups	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	Prohibited	No limit	Subject to state law	No limit
Party congressional campaign committees	No limit	No limit	$5,000	No limit	Prohibited	No limit	Subject to state law	No limit
Party senatorial campaign committees	No limit	No limit	$5,000	No limit	Prohibited	No limit	Subject to state law	No limit
Party national committees	No limit	No limit	$5,000	No limit	Prohibited	No limit	Subject to state law	No limit
State and local party committees	No limit	No limit	$5,000	No limit	Prohibited	No limit	Subject to state law	No limit

Notes: Total annual contributions also include contributions to all federal candidates (see Table 1-1). "National party committees" refers to the parties' national committees, congressional campaign committees, and senatorial campaign committees. Changes in the law are posted at http://herrnson.cqpress.com.

economics; the League of Conservation Voters, an environmental group that supports mainly Democrats; the United Seniors Association, which is funded largely by U.S. pharmaceutical companies; and numerous groups associated with members of Congress, political parties, and other politicians.[18]

A series of court decisions, including one handed down in the midst of the 1996 election season, increased the activities that parties, PACs, and other interest groups can use to influence federal elections.[19] These rulings allow these organizations to spend unlimited sums of hard or soft money on issue advocacy ads that closely resemble electioneering ads that in the past could be financed only with hard money.[20] Most issue advocacy ads are nearly identical to hard money ads in that they praise or criticize federal candidates by name or feature their likenesses. The major differences between the two types of ad are that issue advocacy ads *cannot expressly* call for a candidate's election or defeat, and they tend to be more negative than hard money ads.[21] The courts also asserted the parties' right to make unlimited independent expenditures on campaign communications that *expressly* advocate the election or defeat of a federal candidate—by using phrases like "vote for" or "vote against"—as long as these expenditures are made with hard money and without the candidate's knowledge or consent.

Soft money offers parties and interest groups a number of advantages. It can be raised in huge chunks from a small number of deep-pocketed sources, and it can be spent in competitive elections where it can presumably have a substantial impact on election outcomes. It furnishes political access, and presumably influence, to those who contribute it, and it enables political parties and interest groups to spend extra—and once banned—resources to influence campaigns and ultimately the composition of Congress. Soft money, issue advocacy campaigns, and independent expenditures have significantly increased the influence of political parties and interest groups in congressional elections. These new forms of party and group participation have not done away with the candidate-centered nature of congressional elections, but they have altered it significantly. Soft money was among the most controversial aspects of the election system, and its elimination was a major goal of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. Should the law pass constitutional muster, it could have a major impact on the flow of money in future congressional elections.

POLITICAL CULTURE

Historically, U.S. political culture has supported a system of candidate-centered congressional elections in many ways, but its major influence stems

from its lack of foundation for a party-focused alternative. Americans have traditionally held a jaundiced view of political parties. *Federalist* no. 10 and President George Washington's farewell address are evidence that the framers of the Constitution and the first president thought a multitude of overlapping, wide-ranging interests preferable to class-based divisions represented by ideological parties. The founders designed the political system to encourage pragmatism and compromise in politics and thus to mitigate the harmful effects of factions. Although neither the pluralist system championed by the framers nor the nonpartisan system advocated by Washington has been fully realized, both visions of democracy have found expression in candidate-centered campaigns.

Congressional elections test candidates' abilities to build coalitions of voters and elites from diverse individuals. The multiplicity of overlapping interests, lack of a feudal legacy, and relatively fluid social and economic structure in the United States discourage the formation of class-based parties like those that have developed in most other democracies.[22] The consensus among Americans for liberty, equality, and property rights and their near-universal support for the political system further undermine the development of parties aimed at promoting major political, social, or economic change.[23]

Americans' traditional ambivalence about political parties has found expression during reform periods. The Populist movement of the 1890s, the Progressive movement that came shortly after it, and the rise of the New Left in the 1960s all resulted in political change that weakened the parties. Turn-of-the-century reformers championed the Australian ballot, the direct primary, and civil service laws for the explicit purpose of taking power away from party bosses.[24] Similarly, the reform movement that took hold of the Democratic Party during the 1960s and 1970s opened party conventions, meetings, and leadership positions to the increased participation of previously underrepresented groups. The reforms, many of which were adopted by Republican as well as Democratic state party organizations, made both parties more permeable and responsive to pressures from grassroots activists. They weakened what little influence party leaders had over the awarding of nominations, giving candidates, their supporters, and issue activists more influence over party affairs.[25]

Post–World War II social and cultural transformations undermined the parties even further. Declining immigration and increased geographic mobility eroded the working-class ethnic neighborhoods that were an important source of party loyalists. Increased educational levels encouraged citizens to rely more on their own judgment and less on party cues in political matters. The development of the mass media gave voters less-biased sources of information than

the partisan press. The rise of interest groups, PACs, and other forms of functional and ideological representation created new arenas for political participation and new sources of political cues.[26] The aging of the parties, generational replacement, and the emergence of new issues that cut across existing fault lines led to the decline of party affiliation among voters and to more issue-oriented voting.[27] These developments encouraged voters to rely less on local party officials and opinion leaders for political information.[28] Cultural transformations created a void in electoral politics that individual candidates and their organizations came to fill.

Current attitudes toward the parties reflect the nation's historical experience. Survey research shows that most citizens believe that parties "do more to confuse the issues than to provide a clear choice on the issues," and "create conflict where none exists." Half of the population believes that parties make the political system less efficient and that "it would be better if, in all elections, we put no party labels on the ballot." [29]

Negative attitudes toward the parties are often learned at an early age. Many schoolchildren are routinely instructed to "vote for the best candidate, not the party." This lesson appears to stay with some of them into adulthood. Typically less than 10 percent of all registered voters maintain that the candidate's political party is the biggest factor in their vote decision. Candidates and issues rank higher.[30]

Although American history and culture extol the virtues of political independence and candidate-oriented voting, the electoral behavior of citizens provides an element of partisanship in congressional elections. Approximately two-thirds of all voters were willing to state that they identified with either the Democratic or the Republican Party in 2002, which is typical of the preceding two decades. More than 80 percent of all self-identified independents indicate they lean toward a major party, holding attitudes and exhibiting political behaviors similar to those of self-identified partisans. Although few registered voters state that they cast their votes chiefly on a partisan basis, 81 percent of them cast their congressional ballots along party lines in 2002. Such high levels of party-line voting are common in modern American politics, and partisanship is among the best predictors of voting behavior in congressional elections, ranking second only to incumbency. The fact that roughly nine out of ten members of the voting population perceives, retains, and responds to political information in a partisan manner means that elections are not entirely candidate centered.[31] Yet the degree of partisanship that exists in the contemporary United States is still not strong enough to encourage a return to straight-ticket voting or to foster the development of a party-focused election system.

CAMPAIGN TECHNOLOGY

Political campaigns are designed to communicate ideas and images that will motivate voters to cast their ballots for particular candidates. Some voters are well informed; have strong opinions about candidates, issues, and parties; and will vote without ever coming into contact with a political campaign. Others will never bother to vote, regardless of politicians' efforts. Many voters need to be introduced to the candidates and made aware of the issues to become excited enough to vote in a congressional election. The communication of information is central to democratic elections, and those who are able to control the flow of information have tremendous power. Candidates, campaign organizations, parties, and other groups use a variety of technologies to affect the flow of campaign information and win votes.

Person-to-person contact is one of the oldest and most effective approaches to winning votes. Nothing was or is more effective than a candidate, or a candidate's supporters, directly asking citizens for their votes. During the golden age of parties, local party volunteers assessed the needs of voters in their neighborhoods and delivered the message that, if elected, their party's candidates would help voters achieve their goals.[32] Once these organizations lost their control over the flow of political information, they became less important, and candidate-assembled campaign organizations became more relevant players in elections.

The dawning of the television age and the development of modern campaign technology helped solidify the system of candidate-centered congressional elections.[33] Television and radio studios, printing presses, public opinion polls, personal computers, and sophisticated targeting techniques are well suited to candidate-centered campaign organizations because they, and the services of the political consultants who know how to use them, are readily available for hire. Congressional candidates can assemble organizations that meet their specific needs without having to turn to party organizations for assistance, although many candidates request their party's help.

New technology has encouraged a major change in the focus of most congressional election campaigns. It has enabled campaigns to communicate more information about candidates' personalities, issue positions, and qualifications for office. As a result, less campaign activity is now devoted to party-based appeals. Radio and television were especially important in bringing about this change because they are well suited to conveying images and less useful in providing information about abstract concepts, such as partisan ideologies.[34] The overall effect of the electronic mass media is to direct attention away from parties and toward candidates.

The increased focus on candidate imagery that is associated with the "new style" of campaigning encourages congressional candidates to hire professional technicians to help them convey their political personas to voters.[35] Press secretaries, pollsters, issue and opposition researchers, and media experts are commonplace in most congressional campaigns. Local party activists became less important in congressional elections as the importance of political consultants grew and the contributions of semiskilled and unskilled volunteers diminished. The emergence of a national economy of campaign finance and the rise of a cadre of fundraising specialists with the skills, contacts, and technology to raise money from individuals and PACs further increased the candidate-centered character of election campaigns because they provided candidates with the means for raising the contributions needed to purchase the services of political consultants.

Changes in technology transformed most congressional campaigns from labor-intensive grassroots undertakings, at which local party committees excelled, to money-driven, merchandised activities requiring the services of skilled experts. Most local party committees were unable to adapt to the new style of campaign politics.[36] Initially, party committees in Washington, D.C., and in many states also were unprepared to play a significant role in congressional elections. However, the parties' national, congressional, and senatorial campaign committees and several state party organizations proved more adept at making the transition to the new-style politics. They began to play meaningful roles in congressional election campaigns during the late 1970s and early 1980s and continued to do so into the start of the twenty-first century.[37]

THE POLITICAL SETTING

Candidates, campaign managers, party officials, PAC managers, and others who are active in congressional elections consider more than the institutional framework, the culturally and historically conditioned expectations of voters, and the available technology when planning and executing electoral strategies. They also assess the political setting, including the circumstances in their district, their state, or the nation as a whole. At the local level, important considerations include the party affiliation, tenure, and intentions of the incumbent or other potential candidates, and the partisan history of the seat. Relevant national-level factors include whether it is a presidential or midterm election year, the state of the economy, the president's popularity, international affairs, and the public's attitude toward the government. Hostile sentiments directed at congressional Democrats and President Bill Clinton led to the

Republican takeover of Congress in 1994. Disapproval of the two federal government shutdowns and some elements of the "Republican revolution" helped make many 1996 congressional elections competitive. In 2002, national security issues and the war on terrorism that followed the attacks of September 11 had a major impact on the national political agenda. The issue was pivotal in GOP representative Saxby Chambliss's seven-point victory over Democratic senator Max Cleland in Georgia and in a number of other House and Senate races.

Of course, one's perspective on the limits and possibilities of the political setting depends largely on one's vantage point. Although they talk about the competition and are, indeed, wary of it, congressional incumbents, particularly House members, operate in a political setting that works largely to their benefit. As explained in later chapters, incumbents enjoy significant levels of name recognition and voter support, are able to assemble superior campaign organizations, and can draw on their experience in office to speak knowledgeably about issues and claim credit for the federally financed programs and improvements in their state or district. Incumbents also tend to get favorable treatment from the media. Moreover, most can rely on loyal followers from previous campaigns for continued backing: supporters at home tend to vote repeatedly for incumbents, and supporters in Washington and the nation's other wealthy cities routinely provide incumbents with campaign money.

Things look different from the typical challenger's vantage point. Most challengers, particularly those with some political experience, recognize that most of the cards are stacked against an individual who sets out to take on an incumbent. Little in the setting in which most congressional campaigns take place favors the challenger. Most challengers lack the public visibility, money, and campaign experience to wage a strong campaign. Moreover, because those who work in and help finance campaigns recognize the strong odds against challengers, they usually see little benefit in helping them. As a result, high incumbent success rates have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Senate reelection rates ranged from 55 percent to almost 97 percent between 1950 and 2002. Between 1982 and 2002 almost 4 percent of all Senate incumbents had no major-party opponent, and just over half of those involved in contested races won by 60 percent or more of the two-party vote. Only 16 percent of all senators seeking reelection in 2000 and 2002 were defeated. Between 1950 and 2002, House incumbents enjoyed an overall reelection rate of better than 93 percent; the 2000 and 2002 elections returned to Congress roughly 98 percent and 96 percent, respectively, of those who sought to keep their jobs. Even during the tidal wave that swept away thirty-four Democrats in the House in the 1994 elections, just over 90 percent of all House incumbents who sought to remain in office did so.[38] With some

important exceptions, most experienced politicians wait until an incumbent retires, runs for another office, or dies before running for office. Thus, many House seats fail to attract meaningful competition.

Most elections for open seats are highly competitive. They attract extremely qualified candidates who put together strong campaign organizations, raise huge amounts of money, and mount lively campaigns. Even House candidates of one party campaigning for seats that have been held by the other party for decades can often attract substantial resources, media attention, and votes.

Many explanations exist for the relative lack of competition in House elections. Some districts are so dominated by one party that few individuals of the other party are willing to commit their time, energy, or money to running for office. In many cases, the tradition of one-party dominance is so strong that virtually all the talented, politically ambitious individuals living in the area join the dominant party. When an incumbent in these districts faces a strong challenge, it usually takes place in the primary, and the winner is all but guaranteed success in the general election.[39]

Uncompetitive House districts are often the product of the redistricting process. In states where one party controls both the governorship and the state legislature, partisan gerrymandering is often used to maximize the number of House seats the dominant party can win. In states where each party controls at least some portion of the state government, compromises are frequently made to design districts that protect congressional incumbents. Party officials and political consultants armed with computers, election returns, and demographic statistics can "pack" and "crack" voting blocs in order to promote either of these goals.[40] The result is that large numbers of congressional districts are designed to be uncompetitive. In 2002, for example, only three of California's fifty-three House elections were decided by a margin of less than twenty points, and one of those seats might not have been competitive if scandal-plagued Gary Condit had not lost the Democratic primary. States that use nonpartisan commissions, which often ignore incumbency, tend to produce more competitive House races. In contrast to the situation in California, four of Iowa's five House seats were decided by fewer than fifteen points.

The desire of incumbents to retain their seats has changed Congress in ways that help discourage electoral competition. Most of those who are elected to Congress quickly understand that they will probably never hold a higher office because there are too few of such offices to go around. Like most people, they do everything in their power to hold on to their jobs. Congress has adapted to the career aspirations of its members by providing them with resources that can be used to increase their odds of reelection. Free mailings, WATS lines, Internet web sites, district offices, and subsidized travel help

members gain visibility among their constituents. Federal "pork-barrel" projects also help incumbents win the support of voters.[41] Congressional aides help members write speeches, respond to constituent mail, resolve problems that constituents have with executive branch agencies, and follow the comings and goings in their bosses' districts.[42] These perquisites of office give incumbents tremendous advantages over challengers. They also discourage experienced politicians who could put forth a competitive challenge from taking on an entrenched incumbent.

The dynamics of campaign finance have similar effects. Incumbents have tremendous fundraising advantages over challengers, especially among PACs and wealthy individual donors. Many incumbents build up large war chests to discourage potential challengers from running against them. With the exception of millionaires and celebrities, challengers who decide to contest a race against a member of the House or Senate typically find they are unable to raise the funds needed to mount a viable campaign.

Given that the cards tend to be stacked so heavily in favor of congressional incumbents, most electoral competition takes place in open seats. Open-seat contests draw a larger than usual number of primary contestants. They also attract significantly more money and election assistance from party committees, individuals, PACs, and other groups than do challenger campaigns.[43] Special elections, which are called when a seat becomes vacant because of an incumbent's resignation or death, are open-seat contests that tend to be particularly competitive and unpredictable. They bring out even larger numbers of primary contenders than normal open-seat elections, especially when the seat that has become vacant was formerly held by a longtime incumbent.

The concentration of competition in open-seat elections and the decennial reapportionment and redistricting of House seats have traditionally combined to produce a ten-year, five-election cycle of political competition. Redistricting leads to the creation of many new House seats and the redrawing of the boundaries of numerous others. It encourages an increase in congressional retirements, usually leads more nonincumbents than usual to run for the House, and typically increases competition in many House elections—though the 2002 elections proved to be an exception to the rule.[44]

Another cyclical element of the national political climate that can influence congressional elections is the presence or absence of a presidential election. Presidential elections have higher levels of voter turnout than midterm elections, and they have the potential for coattail effects. A presidential candidate's popularity can become infectious and lead to some increase in support for the party's congressional contestants. A party that enjoys much success in electing congressional candidates during a presidential election year is, of course, likely

to lose some of those seats in the midterm election that follows.[45] An unpopular president can further drag down a party's congressional contestants.[46] Presidential election politics had a strong impact on the election of 1932, in which the Democrats gained ninety seats in the House and thirteen seats in the Senate. The Democratic congressional landslide was a sign of widespread support for the Democratic presidential candidate, Franklin D. Roosevelt, as well as a repudiation of the incumbent president, Herbert Hoover, and his policies for dealing with the Great Depression.[47] Although coattail effects have declined since the 1930s, Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign is credited with helping the Republicans gain thirty-three seats in the House and twelve seats in the Senate.[48] Bill Clinton's presidential elections were conspicuous for their lack of coattails. Democrats lost ten House seats and broke even in the Senate in 1992; they gained only ten seats in the House and lost two seats in the Senate in 1996. George W. Bush's 2000 election similarly lacked coattails, as the Republicans lost two seats in the lower chamber of Congress and four seats in the upper chamber. Coattail effects are rarely visible when a presidential candidate wins by margins as small as Clinton's 43 percent of the popular vote in 1992 and 49 percent in 1996. Of course, Bush won the historic 2000 presidential election, despite receiving 539,947 fewer popular votes than Al Gore.

Congressional candidates who belong to the same party as an unpopular president also run the risk during midterm elections of being blamed for the failures of their party's chief executive.[49] The Republicans' forty-nine-seat House and four-seat Senate losses in 1974 grew out of a sense of disgust about the Nixon administration's role in the Watergate break-in and President Gerald Ford's decision to pardon Nixon.[50] The Democrats' loss of fifty-two seats in the House and eight seats in the Senate in 1994 was caused largely by voter animosity toward Clinton, dissatisfaction with his party's failure to enact health care reform or a middle-class tax cut, and the Republicans' successful portrayal of the White House and the Democratic-controlled Congress as corrupt and out of step with the views of most voters. The Democrats' net gain of five House seats in 1998 bucked a sixty-year trend in which the president's party always suffered losses in midterm elections.[51] The Republicans net gain of six House seats in 2002 also ran against the norm, and their picking up of two seats in the upper chamber reversed sixty-eight years worth of precedent in which the president's party either lost seats or broke even in midterm Senate elections.

The economy, foreign affairs, homeland security, and other national issues can affect congressional elections. The president's party has historically lost congressional seats in midterm elections when economic trends are unfavorable,

although the relationship between economic performance and congressional turnover has weakened in recent years.[52] Foreign affairs may have contributed to the Democrats' congressional losses in 1972 during the Vietnam War, and the wars on terrorism and in Afghanistan may have cost them seats in 2002. Americans, however, tend to be less concerned with "guns" than with "butter," and so international events generally have less of an effect on elections than domestic conditions.

Other national issues that can affect congressional elections are civil rights, social issues, and the attitudes of voters toward political institutions. The civil rights revolution, the women's movement, urban decay, the emergence of the hippie counterculture, and the protests they spawned influenced voting behavior during the 1960s and 1970s.[53] Political scandal, and the widespread distrust of government that usually follows, can lead to the defeat of politicians accused of committing ethical transgressions, but as the 1974 and 1994 elections demonstrate, individual members of Congress who are not directly implicated in scandal can also suffer because of it.

National issues are likely to have the greatest effect on congressional elections when candidates take unambiguous stands on them.[54] Presidential politics are likely to have the most influence on congressional elections when voters closely identify congressional candidates with a party's presidential nominee or an incumbent president. House and Senate candidates generally respond strategically to national politics in order to improve their electoral fortunes. When their party selects a popular presidential candidate or has a popular incumbent in the White House, congressional candidates ally themselves with that individual to take advantage of the party cue. When their party selects an unpopular nominee or is saddled with an unpopular president, congressional candidates seek to protect themselves from the effects of partisanship by distancing themselves from the comings and goings of the executive branch. The partisan campaigns that Democratic congressional candidates ran during the New Deal era and in 1996, and that Republicans mounted in 2000 and 2002, exemplify the former strategy. The independent, nonpartisan campaigns that many congressional Republicans conducted in 1992 and 1996, and that Democrats carried out in 1998 and 2002, are representative of the latter.

RECENT CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

The political settings that have shaped the opportunities presented to politicians, parties, interest groups, and ultimately voters since the early 1990s have had some important similarities. All but the 1994 midterm elections took place during a period of divided control, which made it difficult to credit or blame only one party for the government's performance or the nation's affairs. Most of the elections also took place under the shadow of a weak economy and were haunted by the specter of huge budget deficits. The 1998 and 2000 elections were important exceptions, occurring as the two parties debated how to spend projected budget surpluses.

Civil rights and racial and gender discrimination were issues in many campaigns during this period as a result of the highly publicized studies of the unequal salaries and advancement prospects for women and African Americans and the murder of James Byrd, an African American who was dragged to death behind a truck in Texas. Women's issues also were highlighted by the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and by an admission of adultery that led House Speaker designate Robert Livingston, R.-La., to retire from the House in 1998. Gay rights found its place on the agenda as the nation debated the military's long-standing policy against homosexuals serving in the military. The issue stayed prominent, partially as a result of the gruesome slaying of gay university student Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming.

A final arena in which civil rights issues were fought was redistricting. In 1986 the Supreme Court ruled that any gerrymandering of a congressional district that purposely diluted minority strength was illegal under the 1982 Voting Rights Act.[55] Most states interpreted the ruling cautiously, redrawing many of the districts after the 1990 census with the explicit purpose of giving one or more minority group members better-than-even chances of being elected to the House. Several opposition groups successfully sued in more than a half dozen states, including North Carolina, where redistricting battles continued to be fought well into the 1998 congressional election season. Several of the redistricting plans drawn prior to the 2002 elections also were subject to court challenges. Indeed, only twenty-nine plans went unchallenged before the election, and Mississippi's redistricting plan continued to be challenged after the election.[56]

Dissatisfaction with the political establishment in Washington also occupied a prominent position on the political agenda at the close of the twentieth century. Gridlock and the federal government's inability to solve problems associated with drug abuse, crime, the environment, rising health care costs, the unsatisfactory performance of the nation's schools, the deficit, and myriad other seemingly intractable issues resulted in voter frustration with national politicians. Much of this hostility was directed toward Congress, and many incumbents responded with a strategy that had served them well in the past—running for reelection by campaigning against Congress itself.[57]

Political scandal and the anti-Washington mood gave open-seat and challenger candidates for Congress many powerful issues to use in campaigns during the elections held in the early 1990s. Support for the national legislature plummeted to an all-time low prior to the 1994 elections, with polls estimating that roughly three-fourths of all Americans disapproved of Congress's performance.[58]

Conditions were ripe for the Republicans to pick up a significant number of congressional seats in the 1994 elections. Public hostility toward Washington, Democratic control of both the executive and legislative branches of the national government, and the Democrats' historical association with the growth of federal programs and the bureaucracy put that party in a precarious position. Moreover, Clinton's early missteps on health care reform, gays in the military, and tax cuts, and allegations of ethical misconduct by the president and his administration, energized Republican candidates and their supporters while demoralizing Democrats and their allies. Under Newt Gingrich's leadership, the Republicans capitalized on these circumstances by running a nationalized anti-Washington campaign that drew on the Contract with America.[59]

Following their takeover of Congress in 1994, House Republicans passed most of the popular elements of their contract, including congressional reform, crime control, welfare reform, and other contract provisions that would promote a smaller, less expensive government.[60] However, the public objected to elements of the GOP plan, particularly those seeking to provide tax cuts to the very rich while reducing spending on Medicare, Medicaid, and education. Political stalemate led to two federal government shutdowns, which were largely blamed on Gingrich, increasing public misgivings about the Republican Congress. Democrats sought to capitalize on the Republicans' difficulties by campaigning against what they labeled "the extremist Republican Congress" and offering policy proposals designed to appeal to middle-income and blue-collar families.

The settings for the 1998 and 2000 elections were more promising for incumbents of both parties. Most Americans benefited from a strong economy marked by rising incomes, low inflation, a high employment rate, a booming stock market, and the first federal budget surplus in three decades, leading them to favor incumbents' reelections. Moreover, most individual representatives and senators read polls taken in their districts that were even more favorable than the public's evaluations of Congress as a whole. Constituents typically have much higher opinions of their own representatives than they do of Congress as an institution and its other members.[61] The 1998 and 2000 elections took place in an environment that favored the status quo, gave neither party a strong advantage, and benefited incumbents in general, few of whom were defeated.

At their outset, the 2002 elections also were shaping up to favor incumbents. Public approval of Congress was relatively high, despite economic concerns arising from a falling stock market that was triggered in part by the collapse of many high-tech "dot.com" companies and reports of fraudulent accounting, which brought down companies such as Enron and Arthur Andersen.[62] As noted earlier, House incumbents in most states had worked with state legislative leaders and governors—and party organizations, interest groups, and political consultants with expertise in redistricting—to redraw congressional seats in ways that virtually reassured most of their reelections.

Nevertheless, the pro-incumbent bias of the 2002 elections did not prevent the parties from seeking to create a national issue agenda that would benefit their candidates. Early in the campaign season, Democrats tried to focus attention on the economy and jobs, education, prescription drug costs and health care, the environment, and Social Security. For the Republicans, tax cuts, government downsizing, family values, and other moral issues were central. Following the attacks of September 11, the issue agenda took on a life of its own. National security and the war on terrorism, which had barely registered among the public, rose to prominence in national opinion polls. The president's approval ratings skyrocketed, as has historically occurred when the United States has become involved in an international crisis. Republican congressional candidates benefited from the changed political agenda and from being able to bask in the rays of Bush's high ratings.[63]

Although incumbents generally derive tremendous advantages from the strategic environment, the political setting in a given year can pose obstacles for some of them, resulting in significant numbers losing their seats. The political settings for the congressional elections of 1992 through 1996, for instance, produced more serious challenges to national legislators, particularly House members, than had occurred in the previous decade (see Table 1-3). Nineteen House incumbents lost their primaries in 1992—a post–World War II record; and another thirty-four lost in the general election two years later—the most since the post-Watergate housecleaning of 1974. The results of the 1998 and 2000 elections deviated significantly from the moderate-to-high levels of incumbent losses recorded since 1992. Only one incumbent was defeated in the 1998 primaries, a mere six lost their general elections, and ninety-four enjoyed the luxury of running unopposed by a major-party candidate, one fewer than the record set in 1950.[64] Incumbents fared only slightly worse in 2000, when three lost their primaries and six fell during the general election.[65]

Historical patterns suggested the number of incumbents at risk should have increased substantially in 2002. Elections that immediately follow redistricting are usually marked by large numbers of incumbent defeats in both the

TABLE 1-3
Number of Unchallenged and Defeated House Incumbents, 1982–2002

	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
Incumbents unchallenged by major-party opposition in general election	49	63	71	81	76	25	54	20	94	63	78
Incumbents defeated											
In primary	10	3	3	1	1	19	4	2	1	3	8
In general election	29	16	6	6	15	24	34	20	6	6	8

Sources: Compiled from various editions of *CQ Weekly* and *Congressional Roll Call* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press). The primary and general election results are from Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics on Congress, 2001–2002* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 2002), 69.

Note: The 1982, 1992, and 2002 figures include incumbent-versus-incumbent races.

primaries and the general election. The pitting of incumbents against each other almost always accounts for some of these losses, as does the fact that the prospect of newly-drawn seats often encourages more candidates than usual to challenge sitting House members. Nevertheless, the unique aspects of the most recent wave of redistricting significantly altered this pattern. Only eight incumbents lost their party's nominations in 2002, as opposed to nineteen in 1992 and ten a decade earlier. More remarkably, only eight incumbents lost in the general election in 2002, as opposed to twenty-four and twenty-nine in the previous two post-redistricting contests. The fact that seventy-eight incumbents faced no major-party opposition—more than three times as many as in 1992 and 50 percent more than in 1982—contributed to the high reelection rates in 2002.

The lack of competition in the 2002 House elections is even more apparent when the candidates are divided into categories based on the closeness of their elections. During the post-redistricting elections of 1982, 38 percent of the House candidates in major-party contested races ran in marginal districts. Included in this group are the 15 percent of the candidates classified as "incumbents in jeopardy," on the basis of their having lost the general election or having won by a margin of 20 percent or less of the two-party vote; the 15 percent of the candidates who opposed them—labeled "hopeful challengers"; and the 8 percent of the candidates—classified as open-seat "prospects"—who ran in contests decided by 20 percent or less of the two-party vote (see Table 1-4). The remainder of the candidates, who were involved in uncompetitive races, are referred to as "incumbent shoo-ins," "likely-loser challengers," and

TABLE 1-4
Competition in House Elections, 1982–2002

	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
Incumbents											
In jeopardy	15%	13%	9%	8%	15%	14%	17%	15%	14%	11%	8%
Shoo-ins	27	34	35	39	32	25	27	29	31	35	35
Challengers											
Hopefuls	15	13	9	8	15	14	17	15	14	11	8
Likely losers	27	34	35	39	32	25	27	29	31	35	35
Open-seat candidates											
Prospects	8	5	7	5	5	13	9	8	7	6	8
Mismatched	7	1	4	3	1	9	5	4	3	3	5
(*N*)	(750)	(736)	(720)	(712)	(696)	(794)	(766)	(812)	(680)	(746)	(694)

Source: Compiled from Federal Election Commission data.

Notes: Figures are for major-party candidates in contested general elections, excluding incumbent-versus-incumbent races (which occasionally follow redistricting), runoff elections, and contests won by independents. Incumbents in jeopardy are defined as those who lost or who won by 20 percent or less of the two-party vote. Shoo-ins are incumbents who won by more than 20 percent of the two-party vote. Hopeful challengers are those who won or who lost by 20 percent or less of the two-party vote. Likely loser challengers are those who lost by more than 20 percent of the two-party vote. Open-seat prospects are those whose election was decided by 20 percent or less of the two-party vote. Mismatched open-seat candidates are those whose election was decided by more than 20 percent of the two-party vote. Some columns do not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

"mismatched" open-seat candidates.[66] Slightly more 1992 post-redistricting House elections were competitive than 1982 races because a greater number of retirements led to an increase in the number of marginal open-seat races. A mere 24 percent of the 2002 House elections were competitive by this standard, largely because bipartisan coalitions of sitting House members drew district lines to protect themselves.

The decline in competitive races was not merely the result of redistricting. The realignment of the South from Democratic-controlled, to competitive, to characterized by pockets of one-party domination also had an impact.[67] High reelection rates and the increased costs of campaigning also undoubtedly discouraged many would-be challengers from running for Congress.[68] Incumbency remained a valuable asset, especially in discouraging opposition in 2002.

The Senate elections held in 2002 were not much different from those held in the two decades that preceded them (see Table 1-5). Relatively few

TABLE 1-5
Number of Unchallenged and Defeated Senate Incumbents, 1982–2002

	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
Incumbents unchallenged by major-party opposition in general election	0	1	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	1	4
Incumbents defeated											
In primary	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
In general election	2	3	7	4	1	4	2	1	3	6	3

Sources: Compiled from various issues of *CQ Weekly and Congressional Roll Call* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press). The primary and general election results are from Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics on Congress, 2001–2002* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 2002), 70.

members of the upper chamber were defeated in a primary. Rep. John Sununu defeated Sen. Robert Smith, who felt the wrath of New Hampshire Republicans who were angry over his quitting the GOP in July 1999 and blasting it as "hypocritical" and "not a party that means anything"—only to rejoin it in November.[69] When the classification scheme used for House candidates is applied to the Senate it becomes clear that the number of competitive incumbent-challenger contests in 2002 was not significantly greater than in the previous two years (see Table 1-6). If anything, that four general election races went uncontested in 2002 indicates that there was less competition that year than in many preceding contests.

The competitiveness of congressional elections influences the number of new faces in Congress. As a group, those serving in the 108th Congress are more diverse than those who served a decade ago. The House opened its first session of the 108th Congress with twenty-eight more women, eleven more African Americans, and eleven more Hispanics than had served in the 102d Congress. Change generally comes more slowly to the upper chamber. The number of female senators increased to thirteen.[70] The Senate currently has no African Americans; one Native American, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo.; and only two Asian Americans, Hawaii Democrats Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka.

Despite this increased diversity, the vast majority of newcomers had at least one thing in common with one another and with their more senior colleagues: they came to Congress with significant political experience under their belts. Fifty of the fifty-three new House members elected to the 108th Congress had previously held another public office, served as a party official, worked as a

TABLE 1-6
Competition in Senate Elections, 1982–2002

	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
Incumbents											
In jeopardy	26%	17%	20%	17%	20%	22%	23%	21%	15%	17%	18%
Shoo-ins	20	27	20	24	25	16	14	9	28	26	20
Challengers											
Hopefuls	26	17	20	17	20	22	23	21	15	17	18
Likely losers	20	27	20	24	25	16	14	9	28	26	20
Open-seat candidates											
Prospects	10	10	12	12	3	21	14	35	9	15	24
Mismatched	0	3	6	6	7	3	11	6	6	0	0
(*N*)	(66)	(64)	(68)	(66)	(60)	(68)	(70)	(68)	(68)	(66)	(60)

Source: Compiled from Federal Election Commission data.

Notes: Figures are for major-party candidates in contested general elections. Incumbents in jeopardy are defined as those who lost or who won by 20 percent or less of the two-party vote. Shoo-ins are incumbents who won by more than 20 percent or less of the two-party vote. Hopeful challengers are those who won or who lost by 20 percent or less of the two-party vote. Likely loser challengers are those who lost by more than 20 percent of the two-party vote. Open-seat prospects are those whose election was decided by 20 percent or less of the two-party vote. Mismatched open-seat candidates are those whose election was decided by more than 20 percent or less of the two-party vote. Some columns do not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

political aide or consultant, or run for Congress at least once before getting elected.[71] Only one of the candidates elected to the Senate for the first time in 2002 had not previously held at least one elective office and she—Elizabeth Dole, R.-N.C.—was no amateur. A former cabinet official, presidential candidate, and wife of former Senate majority leader and presidential candidate Robert Dole, R-Kan., she had an abundance of political experience.

SUMMARY

The Constitution, election laws, campaign finance regulations, and participatory nominations provide the institutional foundations for the candidate-centered congressional election system. The United States's history and individualistic political culture, which inform Americans' traditional ambivalence toward political parties, shore up that system. Candidates who can afford to hire political consultants to learn about and contact voters have benefited from

technological advancements, which have allowed the system to assume its contemporary pro-incumbent, professionally oriented, money-fueled form.

How campaigns are conducted in the future will be influenced by changes currently under way in the strategic environment in which congressional elections are waged. Recent changes in campaign finance law, for example, especially those concerning soft money and issue advocacy ads, will affect the abilities of political parties and interest groups to influence the tenor and outcomes of congressional elections.