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**Forgotten Voters:  
Media Coverage in Split Congressional Districts**

by  
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## **Forgotten Voters: Media Coverage in Split Congressional Districts**

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*An unintended consequence of redistricting at the congressional level is that those who live in split congressional districts may be provided less media coverage of those who are running for Congress in their district. A content analysis of the major newspapers for several counties that are split into several different congressional districts finds that those who live in districts that make up a small percentage of a county receive systematically less newspaper coverage of their candidates for Congress than do those who live in the part(s) of a county that have larger percentages of it inside a different congressional district. The analysis also finds that newspaper coverage of both candidates is almost wholly a function of coverage of the candidate that ends up losing the election. Several implications are drawn from the analysis, including an argument that the information asymmetries thrust upon those living in split congressional districts can negatively impact issues of voter turnout and self-governance.*

While 'all politics may be local,'<sup>2</sup> the ability of members of Congress to get local media coverage can be very difficult. Given the conventions of news coverage, members of Congress who represent split congressional districts may have an even greater challenge when it comes to locally publicizing both their work in Washington and their efforts at reelection. What is more, non-incumbent candidates for Congress in split congressional districts can face nearly insurmountable challenges to get coverage from the local media.

<sup>1</sup> This paper contains arguments and data that will appear in a paper co-authored with Jonathan Winburn at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. The paper, "Gerrymandering, Split Districts, and Forgotten Voters," as well as this paper uses data collected by Gerald C. Wright (thanks to Gerald C. Wright and Jonathan Winburn) and data collected from 15 newspapers via Lexis-Nexis and the world wide web. All errors in this paper remain my own.

<sup>2</sup> Apologies to Tip O'Neill.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I define split congressional districts in terms of counties that encompass part of, but not all of a congressional district. It refers to the percentage of county X that is in district Y. For example, four different congressional districts represent a certain segment of the population in Hennepin County, MN. Each of those districts within that county is considered a split district in this analysis.

As voter turnout continues to decline, understanding the media's potential role in minimizing information asymmetries for potential voters is increasingly important. Additionally, the media's potential impact on voter turnout could have important implications for questions of self-governance. As such, it is useful for the purposes of this analysis to employ elements of the institutional analysis and development (IAD) framework as it highlights exchanges between 1) the nature of the goods; 2) the "rules in use" versus the written laws and constitutions; and 3) the attributes of the community (Kiser and Ostrom 1982). Applying these concepts to media coverage of split congressional districts is an under-tilled, yet useful endeavor.

Ostrom (2002) argues that "simply having national elections, choosing leaders, and asking them to pass good legislation, is hardly sufficient, however, to sustain a self-governing society in the long run... the central problem is how to embed elected officials in a set of institutions that generates information about their actions, holds them accountable, allows for rapid response at times of threat, and encourages innovation and problem solving" (3). One such institution that elected leaders are embedded in is that of the media (Cook 1998). Here, the term "institution" is understood to mean entities that are "enduring regularities of human action in situations structured by rules, norms, and shared strategies, as well as by the physical world" (Crawford and Ostrom 1995, p. 582).

In this paper, I content analyze newspaper coverage of 13 counties that make up parts of 38 congressional districts to seek an answer to the following questions: 1) what impact do split congressional districts have on media coverage of congressional candidates? 2) What are the possible implications of coverage of split district candidates on voter turnout self-governance? I seek answers to these questions by developing a

theory of media coverage in split congressional districts, describing the data and methods used, reporting results, and discussing implications of the findings on issues of turnout and self-governance. I posit that norms used by the media regarding what to cover, as well as the physical characteristics of a newspaper market and the characteristics of a community restrict coverage of the member of Congress and his or her opponent in an election. Voters living in the "short end" of split districts are less likely to be provided coverage about the candidates in their congressional district. In other words, those voters must deal with an information asymmetry regarding congressional elections (Weimer and Vining 1999).

### **Theory of Media Coverage in Split Congressional Districts**

#### *District Alignment*

A great deal of redistricting research focuses on the consequences for representation from the aspect of minority and partisan electoral gains and losses (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999; Gelman and King 1994). Less work has been done regarding the media's role in covering Congress after redistricting.<sup>4</sup> Understanding how redistricting can result in information asymmetries that are a function of a lack of media coverage is one of the goals of this paper.

#### *What's News?*

The first element of the IAD framework calls for the institutional analyst to examine the "nature of the goods being produced, provided and consumed" (McGinnis 1999). Bennett (1996) argues that the media's nature is that of an "information order without design" (12). More specifically, Graber (1993) explains that news selection

<sup>4</sup> Schaffier's (2002) discussion of media markets and congressional coverage is given close attention in this analysis.

depends on the intraorganizational norms of news reporters and the news business. These norms include internal and external competition for scoops and news space, general conventions of news writing, and story selection to increase audience size and to please advertisers (Bennett 1996). It is important to note that these "news norms" are not rules (Crawford and Ostrom 1995). Instead, they are generally understood principles among professional journalists about the way things should be done. While I do not go so far as to call these norms "unofficial rules," it is important to consider Ostrom's (forthcoming) claim that "rules need not be written" (19). Political and economic pressures impact news selection as well. The kind of coverage that achieves prominence in the media is not commensurate with their actual political significance (Gans 1980). Still, as Graber (1993) explains, knowing "what's news" is somewhat nebulous:

"What is publishable news is a decision that hinges on shared attitudes of newspeople and their audience, and on the nature of their social and political settings. What is publishable in one setting for one medium is not necessarily appropriate for another. Newsworthiness of individual stories will vary from country to country audience to audience, and time to time" (83).

Graber (1993) outlines five criteria that are used to choose news stories. First, the story needs to have a *strong impact* on the media consumer. Second, stories should have a natural or man-made *disaster, scandal, conflict, or violence*. Third, the story needs to be *familiar* to media consumers. The fourth element of newsworthiness is closely related to the third: news stories should be *close to home*. Finally, stories should be *novel or timely*. In short, the goals of news are to attract and entertain audiences, not report on the most politically significant aspects of the day.

Entman (1989) argues that "the media make a significant contribution to what people think - to their political preferences and evaluations - precisely by affecting what they think about," (pg. 347). Further, (Graber 1993, Iyengar & Kinder 1987, Entman

1989, Entman 1993, Briars & Wattenberg 1996) note that the media can influence the public by omitting and de-emphasizing information.<sup>5</sup> Further, Bartels (1993) argues that consistent, distinctive media attention to issues over time can result in significant opinion changes on those issues. Thus, examining media coverage of congressional candidates in split districts over time is useful because the impact of this coverage could result in opinion formation and change among the electorate that could help decide the results of elections.

The second element of the IAD framework examines distinctions between "rules in use" and rules that are written. The constitutional laws governing the media are generally considered to be the rules and regulations laid forth by the Federal Communications Commission. For the purposes of this paper, these rules have little to do with the kind of information that actually gets reported. More important for reporters and editors in the newsroom when it comes to choosing stories and deciding how to cover them are the institutional norms discussed above. Before discussing theoretical expectations for coverage in split congressional districts, it is useful to develop an understanding of media coverage of elections and media coverage of Congress.

The third element of the IAD framework requires recognition of the attributes of the community. The attributes of interest in this paper are physical ones: congressional district lines, county lines, and media market lines. District lines govern which citizens are represented by which member of Congress, county lines denote which county a citizen lives in (in this paper, the county is not nearly as important as the district and media market). The media market lines (210 for 438 congressional districts) govern what

<sup>5</sup> Kahn and Kenney (2002) show that editorial endorsements can impact campaign coverage. Future analysis on this paper will incorporate editorial endorsements as a control variable for coverage of the

news source that people living within the county lines are likely to receive (Schaffner 2002).

*Media Coverage of Congress and Elections*

Schaffner (2001) shows that local coverage of members of Congress impacts the knowledge voters have about politics. Clarke and Evans (1983) find that the more coverage given to a congressional campaign, the more information NES respondents had about the candidates. In other words, media coverage can provide voters with valuable information that they can use to make decisions about who to vote for on Election Day. One of the best known aspects of coverage during elections is what is known as horse race coverage, coverage that focuses on strategy and who is winning, rather than substantive issues. Mutz (1995) argues people contribute to campaigns strategically in presidential primaries. When a contributor supports a candidate based on ideology, they may be more likely to contribute during times of negative horse-race spin, whereas candidates that find less ideologically based support find their contributions rise and fall with positive and negative horse-race coverage. Mondak (1995) finds that media exposure fuels political discussion, but that effects of that discussion on decisions made at the ballot box are not influenced by the specific content of interpersonal discussion.

Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) find that "a newspaper's editorial content is significantly related to candidate preferences in 1992 ... local newspapers can play a significant role in providing cues that influence voters' electoral calculus." Jacobson (1978) finds that spending by challengers has a much greater impact on the outcome of an election than does spending by incumbents. Cox and Munger (1989) also point to the importance of examining campaign contributions to determine coverage and turnout.

eventual winner in a congressional campaign.

Perhaps most importantly, Vinson (1997) and Clarke and Evans (1983) find that local reporters tend to favor covering their local representative. This is important as it means that local reporters working in Washington are more interested in what the local members of Congress are doing than they are worried about what is getting national attention. As a result, coverage of local members of Congress is critical for citizens to be able to hold their representatives accountable. Therefore, we can expect members of Congress to receive attention from local newspapers. Thus, I expect coverage of candidates for Congress that represent split congressional districts to look like this:

<i>Percent of district in county/media market</i>	<i>Campaign Finance Information</i>	<i>Norms</i>
<i>of news selection</i>	<i>Coverage of Candidates (whether winners, losers, or both)</i>	

H1: The smaller the percentage of a county that lies in a congressional district, the less coverage the winning candidate will receive than other congressional candidates who represent a district that takes up a greater percentage of the county.

Newspapers have an incentive to cover the candidates that make up a greater percentage of their readership, regardless of how many congressional districts sneak into a part of the overall media market. For counties with multiple districts, the district that takes up the largest portion of the county should have its candidates receiving more coverage than candidates from other districts that are not a significant part of the dominant media market.

H2: The smaller the percentage of a county that lies in a congressional district, the less coverage the losing candidate will receive than other congressional candidates who represent a district that takes up a greater percentage of the county.

The same logic holds for hypothesis two. Additionally, we might expect that some of the candidates that end up losing did not run very strong races. This might also act in a way that drives down coverage.

H3: The smaller the percentage of a county that lies in a congressional district, the less coverage both candidates will jointly receive than other congressional candidates who represent a district that takes up a greater percentage of the county.

While providing "side by side" coverage of candidates may attract more readers, it requires an increase in transaction costs for the reporter, the editor, and the paper to complete this kind of story, especially if the story is about two candidates in a district that barely enters into the paper's market. In other words, it provides little bang for the paper's buck.

#### *Self-Governance*

Before moving on to a discussion of the data and methods of analysis, it is important to begin considering the issues of self-governance that could be impacted by confirmation of the above hypotheses. Ostrom (2002) argues that the necessary conditions for self-governance are: 1) most individuals share a common understanding of their physical world(s), 2) most people have gained skills such as building trust, 3) individuals have considerable autonomy, 4) individuals learn to analyze incentives, and 5) new individuals replace old ones in a multi-tiered self governing entity in a "science of association" (2)<sup>6</sup>. One useful and under-titled framework for studying the likelihood these conditions exist is the news-making process and its impact on coverage of congressional elections.

<sup>6</sup> These are not determinate outcomes, they are posed as a "possibility" (Ostrom 2002, p. 2).

## **Data and Methods**

In the following analysis, I content analyze (Krippendorff 1980) 13 newspapers from 38 congressional districts. For newspaper coverage of these districts, it is the media market that is important for purposes of analysis, not the congressional district (Schaffher 2002). As such, the newspaper analyzed for each county was chosen based on what media market it is located in, rather than the media market the bulk of the congressional district is located in-sometimes these are different. Newspapers provide members of and candidates for Congress the opportunity to present a great deal of information in a single news story (Vinson 1997). Newspaper stories are far more detailed than the average local television reports; as Hollihan notes, "television news is essentially a headline service" (2001, p. 82). While television newscasts reach more people than newspapers do, a newspaper story provides much more information. Additionally, the information received by citizens in a newspaper report is not as fleeting. A person can reread a newspaper story whereas a person cannot (unless they have Tivo or some similar satellite product) re-watch a television news story. What is more, the Pew Center notes that newspaper readership increased during the late 1980s (Schaffher 2002). The unit of analysis was an individual news story that was printed in the main (usually morning) edition of the paper. In every case but one (Kennebec County, Maine), the paper analyzed was a "large city" newspaper. There is no theoretical reason to expect that a smaller paper would run stories pertaining to the members of Congress that represents part of a county in a different way than a large city paper. The resources a small paper devotes to Washington news may be less, but these papers still receive the press releases from the member of Congress (Schaffher 2002) and they can use wire service stories

written by large city reporters that mention the smaller paper's members of Congress. In other words, members of Congress exhibit the same base level of effort (faxing a news release) to get coverage from any media outlet.

The time frame covered was from June 1, 2000 to November 7, 2000 (Election Day). While a great deal of election coverage at the congressional level takes place during the last month of the election season, this extended time frame provides a greater opportunity for voters to close information gaps about the candidates running for office. Consistent, long term coverage such as that analyzed here can impact public opinion in significant ways (Battels 1993).

While it is exceptionally difficult to find adequate control variables to act as a proxy for intraorganizational norms in the media, one variable that fits in the theory of coverage of split district candidates is available to act as a control on the amount of coverage given to candidates. Candidates' campaign finance records are easily obtainable. Their final fundraising totals are used in this analysis as control variables. They are aggregated as the funds raised by the winner and the funds raised by the loser.<sup>7</sup> Only competitive races (races where there are two major party candidates) are analyzed, meaning that the districts where a candidate ran unopposed were omitted from the analysis.

Ordinary Least-Squares Regression (OLS) is appropriate for this analysis (Kennedy 2001). The models used are as follows:

Model 1: Coverage of Winner<sup>8</sup> = a + (31 Percent + (32 Money Winner + (33 Money Loser

<sup>7</sup> As one might expect, in all cases but two, the winner was also an incumbent. In one of the two remaining cases, the candidates were running for an open seat.

<sup>8</sup> Creating a variable to control for incumbency was attempted, but it was very highly collinear with the Coverage Winner variable. Because of the limited number of cases, I did not want a dummy variable for incumbency to minimize the impact of coverage given to the winner of a race. As more data become

Model 2: Coverage of Loser = a + (31 Percent + (32 Money Winner + p3 Money Loser  
Model 3: Coverage of Both Candidates = a + pi Percent + p2 Money Winner + p3  
Money Loser

Percent is equal to the percentage of the county in a particular congressional district,  
Money Winner is equal to the total amount of funds raised by the winning candidate, and  
Money Loser is equal to the total amount of funds raised by the losing candidate. The  
dependent variables are operationalized as the number of stories mentioning the  
candidates. Coverage of Winner is the number mentioning the winner, Coverage of  
Loser is the number of stories mentioning the loser, and Coverage of Both is the number  
of stories mentioning both candidates.

#### **Data Analysis<sup>9</sup>**

An initial examination of the data (not reported) shows that those living in the  
portion of the county that are split into several congressional districts that are smaller  
than the other portions of the county that are in other districts receive less newspaper  
coverage of their congressional candidates. For example, 84% of Montgomery County,  
PA is in Pennsylvania's 13<sup>th</sup> congressional district. That district's candidates for  
congress received 59 stories for the winner, 26 for the loser, mentioning both candidates  
in 21 stories in their dominant newspaper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and  
15<sup>th</sup> districts make up a total of 14% of Montgomery County. Three of the losing  
candidates in those districts were *never* mentioned in the paper. The other was  
mentioned three times. The winners were mentioned 41, 40, 20 and 17 times,

available in a future version of this paper, I will attempt to control for incumbency. I will also attempt to  
distinguish between campaign news stories and member of Congress news stories, but the limitations of  
data made that impossible for this project

<sup>9</sup> Some values were left out of the analysis (given a ".") because the race was not contested by a member of  
both major parties. Sometimes, the unopposed candidate was representing the bulk of a split-districted  
county and received coverage commensurate with an opposed candidate in a similar situation.

respectively. However, a significant portion of those stories merely listed the winners in endorsements on or near Election Day, or buried the names of the candidates in stories about the more prominent member of Congress in the media market (the one in the 13<sup>th</sup> district).

(Table 1 about here)

Table 1 indicates that the amount of money raised by the winner of the campaign has a statistically significant relationship with the coverage given to the winner. However, the coefficient is quite small, leading us to conclude that the substantive relationship between money raised and coverage received to be minimal. The amount of money raised by the loser does have a negative relationship with the coverage provided to the winner, but it does not approach any meaningful statistical significance. An increase in the number of cases analyzed could result in increased substantive significance in the Money Winner variable.

Importantly, and as predicted, the percentage of the county in a particular congressional district has a statistically significant relationship with the amount of coverage devoted to the winner. When it comes to the amount of coverage a candidate receives from the major newspaper in the media market of his or her district, the greater the percentage of the county that is in the district, the greater the coverage that is afforded to the candidate. Voters living in the part of a district that represents a small percentage of a county receive less information about their candidates for office than those who live in a part of a district that represents a greater percentage of a county.

The model's  $R^2$  is .2286, indicating that the variables in the model explain about a quarter of the variation in coverage given to the winner of a congressional election in a

split district. Thus, hypothesis 1 is confirmed by this analysis, though there are untapped variables that also play a role in the coverage a winning congressional candidate receives in a split district.

(Figure 1 about here)

Graphically, we can see in Figure 1, that there is a relationship between the increased percentage of a county represented by a congressional district and the amount of coverage received by the eventual winner in the race. Only two cases fall below the predicted value once 50% of the county or more falls into one congressional district. In both cases, these anomalies can be reasonably explained. Both cases (Nebraska and Maine) represent situations where the dominant media market for the county is not the dominant media market for the congressional district. In Nebraska, for example, the 1<sup>st</sup> district is mostly covered by the Lincoln media market, even though Cass County is covered by the Omaha market. About 69% of Cass County lies in the 1<sup>st</sup> district, so we might expect the Omaha paper to cover the 1<sup>st</sup> district race more for Cass County than the 2<sup>nd</sup> district race (where only 31% of Cass County residents reside). However, the Omaha paper's media market serves the 2<sup>nd</sup> district, as Omaha lies in Douglas County, a county that wholly resides in the 2<sup>nd</sup> district. In other words, the two cases that fall below the predicted line do so because their district is represented by a different media market than their county is located in.

(Table 2 about here)

What relationship exists between the coverage received by the losing candidate and the percentage of a county that is in a district? Table 2 presents a less clear picture.

None of the variables analyzed reach the level of statistical significance. The fundraising done by the winner has a small, negative impact on coverage given to the losing candidate for congress in split congressional districts. The fundraising done by the loser has small positive impact. The percentage of the county in the split district has a positive, non-statistically significant relationship with the coverage given to the losing candidate, but it is over eight times smaller than the Percentage coefficient in Table 1. Again, a small N could be the culprit here, but the data presented do not allow us to conclude that the percentage of a county in a district significantly impacts the coverage a losing candidate receives in the media market newspaper. Thus, hypothesis 2 is not confirmed by this analysis. The small  $R^2$  indicates that the variables included in this model do not explain enough of what impacts coverage of the losing candidate to be of much substantive use.

(Figure 2 about here)

Graphically, Figure 2 shows that only one race falls above the predicted value of coverage received by the losing candidate when it is compared with the percentage of a county comprised by part of a split district. Even when more than 90% of a county is in a split district, the losing candidate does not get very much news coverage. This makes it very difficult for citizens to learn much about both major party candidates for congress.

(Table 3 about here)

If the coverage received by the winner is impacted significantly by the Percentage variable, but the coverage received by the loser does not, what about the coverage the candidates jointly received? Table 3 presents the results of OLS analysis where the dependent variable is the number of stories that mentions both candidates for congress in

a particular district. As is the case in Table 2, none of the variables reach the level of statistical significance. However, the Percentage and Money Loser variables are stronger in this model than in the one presented in Table 2. Even so, hypothesis 3 is not confirmed by this analysis. As was the case with hypothesis 2 and Model 2, the small  $R^2$  indicates the model does a poor job of explaining what affects the coverage received by both candidates in a split congressional district.

While Model 3's results do not achieve statistical significance in Table 3, there is another way to account for the coverage both candidates received in the six months prior to election. There is a strong face validity (not reported here) in the data that suggest the coverage both candidates receive is almost exactly equal to the amount of coverage the losing candidate receives in nearly every single race. The exceptions, such as the race in Nebraska's 2<sup>nd</sup> district, are when the losing candidate held a lower elected office, in this case, State Senator. As a result, the losing candidate, Shelley Kiel, received coverage on state legislature issues that did not mention the member of Congress she opposed in the 2000 election, Lee Terry. The new model accounts for the coverage received by the winner and loser and is as follows:

Model 4: Coverage Both= a + 01 Money Winner + 02 Money Loser + 03 Percent + 04 Coverage Winner + 05 Coverage Loser.

(Table 4 about here)

The results reported in Table 4 show that the Percent, Money Winner, and Money Loser variables are not statistically significant. The Percent variable is positive and slightly larger than the Percent variable in Table 3, the Money Loser variable is negatively related to the coverage of both candidates and the Money Winner variable is

positively related to the coverage of both office seekers. The Coverage Winner variable is statistically significant, though only slightly so substantively. The variable to notice, as suggested above, is the Coverage Loser variable. The coefficient is several times larger than the coefficient for Coverage Winner and it is significant beyond the .0001 level. The  $R^2$  for the model is .9437, meaning that the model explains an incredibly significant amount of the coverage received by both candidates. Coverage for both candidates is almost entirely dependent upon the amount of coverage given to the losing candidate. The loser is very rarely mentioned without the winner also being mentioned, even though the winner is often reported on in a story that never mentions the candidate who later loses the election. In fact, in only eight of 35 cases does coverage of the losing candidate eclipse 15 total stories in the six months leading up to an election. Of those, several merely mention the names of a candidate as someone who is running against the candidate who eventually won the election.

(Figure 3 about here)

Depending on how one reads Figure 3, it can be argued that there is not one single race where the predicted amount of coverage is less than the actual coverage received by both candidates when compared with the percentage of a county that makes up part of a split district. In other words, there are very few opportunities for citizens to compare and contrast the two major party candidates for Congress in the 2000 election. What is more, many of the articles that mentioned both candidates did so only to note that the eventual loser was either way behind, running a poor campaign, or was without any real chance to win. Other articles mentioned both candidates in passing. Many of the instances where

both candidates were mentioned were cases where the newspaper was endorsing one candidate and merely mentioning the name of the other.

This analysis suggests that there may be an unintended consequence, or negative externality, to redistricting. Drawing district lines to maximize potential votes could also result in situations where voters who live in split districts (and especially voters in the smaller parts of the county that are parts of different districts) know much less about their member of Congress than others know about their representative. In addition, they may be represented by someone who is different than the person who represents their neighbors, yet they may learn more about their neighbors' representative from their daily newspaper.

#### *Problems*

While the analysis is compelling in many ways, it does suffer from some problems. Multi-collinearity between the Coverage Winner variable and a control for incumbency gives us pause in that the results reported may merely show an incumbent advantage. As more data become available, we hope to overcome this problem. For this paper, though, one race was in an open seat and another race saw the incumbent go down to defeat. When those cases were omitted from separate analysis (unreported here), the results did not change, leading me to believe that the Coverage Winner variable is appropriate for this analysis.

Even so, Models 2 and 3 failed to achieve statistical significance. As more data become available, these models will be tested again. At the time of this writing, we only had data on split districts from 12 states. Media data was immediately available from 13 counties, even though many more counties in each state had split districts. With more

time to gather more data, we will be able to solve our small N problem and we hope to be better able to control for incumbency.

### **Implications for Voting and Self-Governance**

It is clear from the above analysis that those who live in the small parts of a county that are drawn into a different congressional district than the media market they live in are much less likely to receive information about their candidates for Congress. In this section, I will discuss the implications of this conclusion.

First, it may be that voters who are "forgotten" by the media also "forget" to vote for a congressional candidate. With low information about the race, split district voters may vote less than voters who do not live in split congressional district may. This is because they are isolated from the majority of their county's representation at the congressional level<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding issues of **self**-governance, the implications are many. First, citizens in split congressional districts (or at least those in the smaller percentages of a district) may be less likely to utilize their capacity for "voice" (Oakerson and Parks 1999). Oakerson notes that polycentricity can go beyond the concept of voting with one's feet. He argues that citizens are able to voice their concerns to alleviate a need to move to a new jurisdiction. Because of the information asymmetry (Weimer and Vining1999) that exists in split congressional districts, citizens may not know to whom they are supposed to voice their federal concerns. While the federal level is certainly not the local level, an

<sup>10</sup> This paper acts as a piece of the analysis Jonathan Winburn and I will complete for the 2003 annual conference of the Midwest Political Science Association. We will posit that the information asymmetries in newspaper coverage and the gerrymandering of district lines will result in a decline in voter turnout among those living in split congressional districts. The paper is intended to illustrate another issue that can prevent the redistricting process from providing fair and equal representation.

inability to voice concerns at one level of government could drift into other levels of government as well, impacting *governance*. Similarly, citizens are better able to hold their House members accountable when information about those legislators' actions is readily available. In split districts where districts and markets often do not coincide, the political system suffers as citizens receive little information about candidates for Congress. This lack of information removes the feeling that one has a local representative in Congress and complicates the process of holding that elected official accountable. In short, it has the potential to silence voice.

A second implication from this analysis becomes apparent when we consider the information gained by citizens about their candidates for Congress to be coproduced. As McGinnis (1999) argues, "coproduction has a close affinity to self-governance, and its importance for the evaluation of public policy deserves to be more widely appreciated" (21). Citizens are able to directly participate in the production of certain public services. The same is true of the public/private<sup>11</sup> good of news. Citizens living in split districts seem to be less likely to coproduce information about the candidates for Congress in their district.

Third, when we revisit Ostrom's necessary conditions for self-governance, we find that citizens in split districts may not share a common understanding of their physical world in a certain sense. The citizen may understand he or she lives in the same county as someone else, but he or she may or may not realize they live in a different congressional district than someone in the same county as they are. Additionally, analyzing incentives related to their understanding of what it is their candidates for

Congress are saying they will do is significantly more difficult for those living in a split congressional district.

Split districts can also alter the incentives of representatives<sup>12</sup>. We could assume that House members' behavior largely structures the relationship between legislators and constituents. Yet, the results reported here indicate that much of this relationship depends on the physical world of the media market, yet another physical space citizens have to negotiate to achieve self-governance. Members of Congress might be wise to focus on the predominant media market in their district, even if that means ignoring voters that live in part of a county that makes up a small percentage of the district, but is in a different media market.

#### **Future Research**

The next step in this research program calls for a test of whether media coverage in split congressional districts impacts voter turnout. It could also be that media coverage in split districts does not impact turnout, but does increase roll-off in congressional voting.

Additionally, it is useful to pursue a case study of a particular county that contains parts of several congressional districts and conduct interviews with citizens in each district. A project could determine if the citizens know much about their representative, as well as how much they know about the representative who represents a district that dominates the media market. Then, the study could determine whether citizens felt their ability to use voice was harmed by their living in a split congressional district.

<sup>11</sup> I say "public/private" because newspapers are excludable, but there is a great deal of research about social networks and the calculus of voting that shows news coverage is discussed freely and can be considered to be a part of a voting decision.

<sup>12</sup> See Fenno's (1978) discussion of the concentric circles of constituency.

Regardless, it is clear that information asymmetries about congressional elections exist for citizens in split congressional districts. With another round of redistricting now behind us, it will be important to keep an eye on the consequences of drawing new district lines.

**Tables and Figures**

*Table 1-Coverage of Winner in Split District Races*

Coverage Winner	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error	T
Money Winner <sup>13</sup>	.0000217*	.0000119	1.81
Money Loser	-.0000166	.0000119	-1.40
Percent	34.1742**	14.55799	2.35
Constant ( $\alpha$ )	16.8942	11.42002	1.48

N=33, F=2.86, R<sup>2</sup>=.2286, \*= $p < .1$ , \*\*= $p < .05$

*Table 2 – Coverage of Loser in Split District Races*

Coverage Loser	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error	T
Money Winner	-6.54e-06	7.04e-06	-0.93
Money Loser	.0000117	6.87e-06	1.71
Percent	4.2432	8.422	0.50
Constant ( $\alpha$ )	14.216**	6.786	2.09

N=32, F=1.02, R<sup>2</sup>=.0989, \*= $p < .1$ , \*\*= $p < .05$

*Table 3 – Coverage of Both Candidates in Split District Races*

Coverage Both	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error	T
Money Winner	-3.16e-06	5.95e-06	-0.53
Money Loser	7.55e-06	5.81e-06	1.30
Percent	6.922	7.118	0.97
Constant ( $\alpha$ )	9.590	5.735	1.67

N=32, F=0.84, R<sup>2</sup>=.0821, \*= $p < .1$ , \*\*= $p < .05$

<sup>13</sup> All information about candidate fundraising was acquired at [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov).

Table 4 – Coverage of Both Candidates in Split District Races

Coverage Both	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error	T
Money Winner	8.09e-07	1.73e-06	0.47
Money Loser	-6.24e-07	1.75e-06	-0.36
Percent	1.975	2.2022	0.98
Coverage Winner	0.0496*	0.0282	1.76
Coverage Loser	0.7668***	0.4953	15.48
Constant ( $\alpha$ )	-2.182	1.588	-1.37

N=32, F=87.22, R<sup>2</sup>=.9437, \*= $p < .1$ , \*\*= $p < .05$ , \*\*\*= $p < .001$

Figure 1 – Coverage of Winner and Percent of County in Congressional District

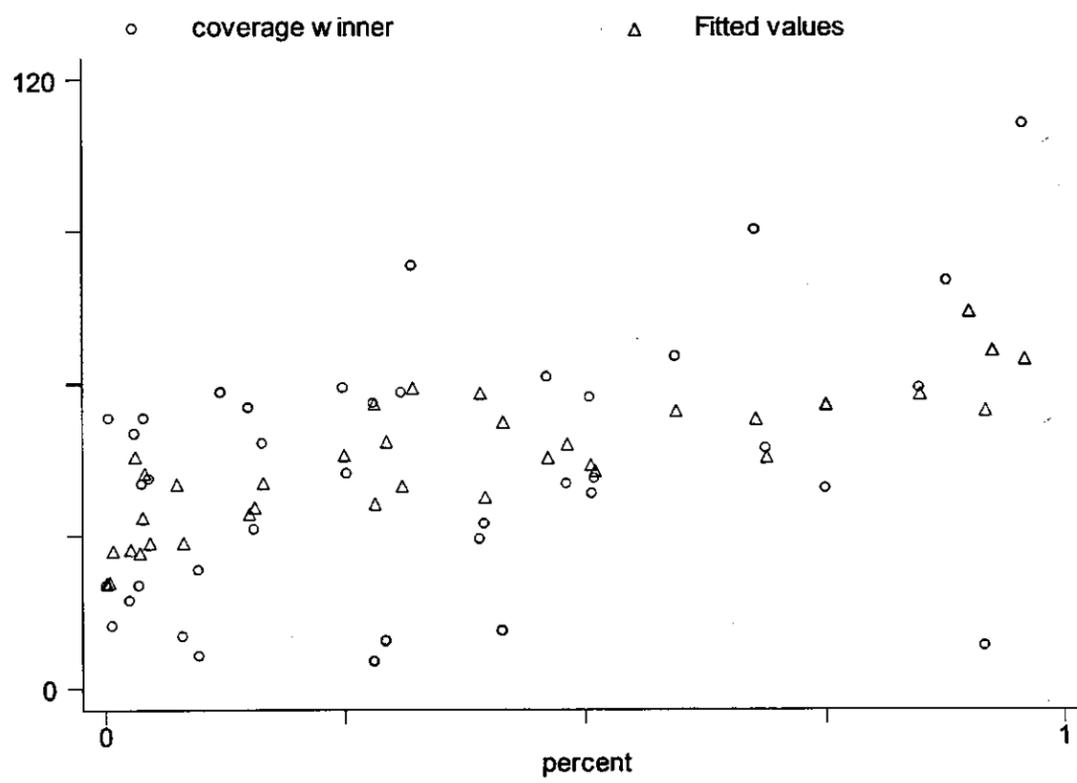


Figure 2 – Coverage of Loser and Percent of County in Congressional District

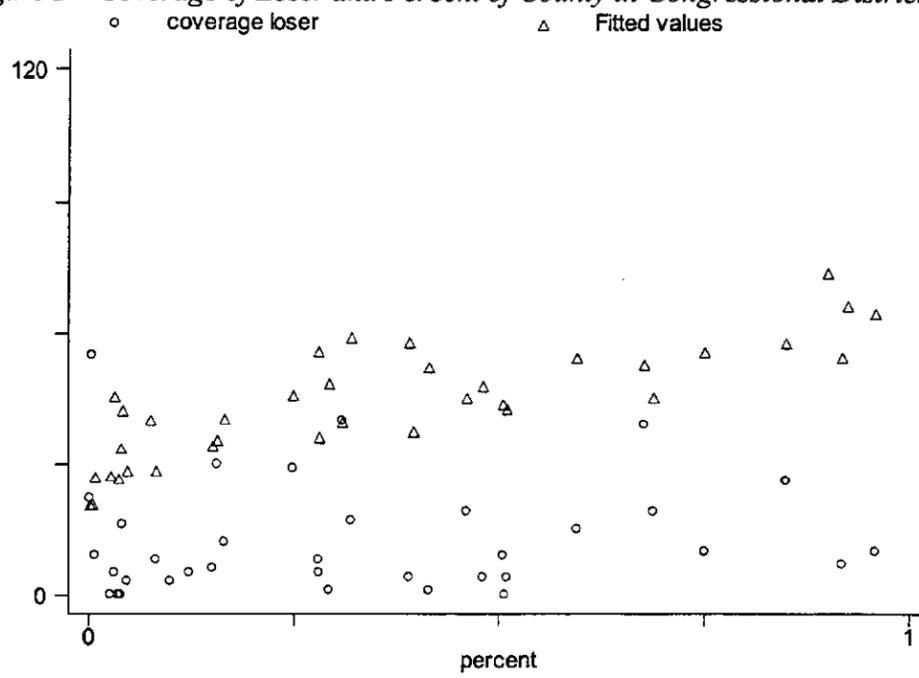
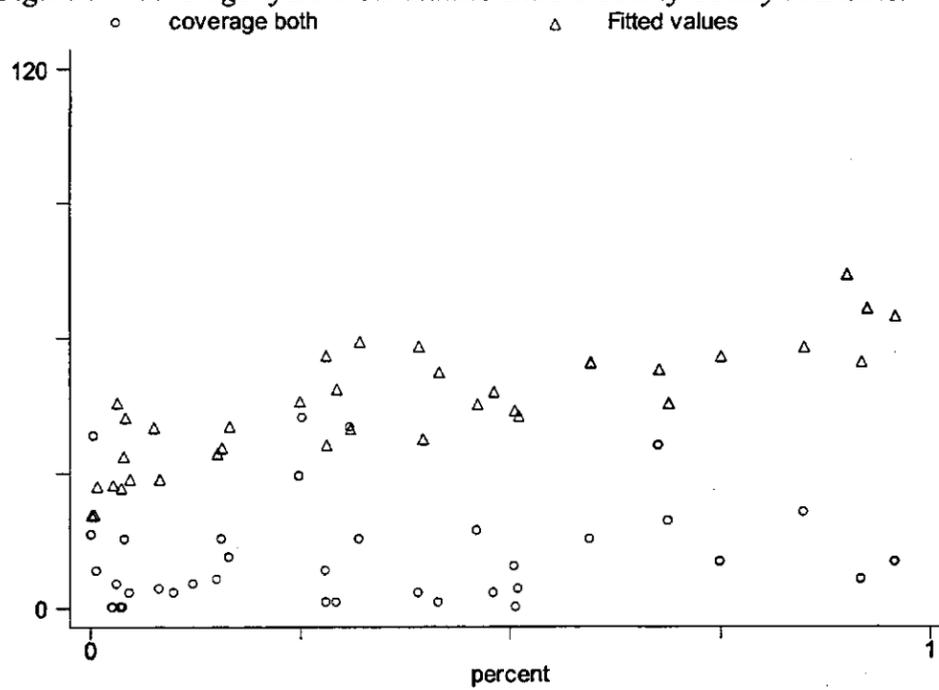


Figure 3 – Coverage of Both Candidates and Percent of County in District



## Appendix 1 - Newspapers Analyzed

The papers chosen below are the dominant papers for the media market the candidates were running in during the 2000 elections (Schaffner 2002).

<b>Congressional Districts &amp; County</b>	<b>Newspaper Analyzed</b>
CO-1,2,4 – Adams	<i>Denver Post</i>
CT-1,6 – Hartford	<i>Hartford Courant</i>
GA-5,6 – Fulton	<i>Atlanta Journal-Constitution</i>
LA-1,2 -- Orleans	<i>New Orleans Times-Picayune</i>
MA-7,8,9 -- Suffolk	<i>Boston Globe</i>
ME-1,2 – Kennebec	<i>Kennebec Journal</i>
MI-8,9,11,12 -- Oakland	<i>Detroit Free Press</i>
MN-2,3,4,5 -- Hennepin	<i>Minneapolis Star-Tribune</i>
NE-1,2 -- Cass	<i>Omaha World Herald</i>
NM-1,3 -- Santa Fe	<i>Santa Fe New Mexican</i>
PA-6,7,8,13,15 -- Montgomery	<i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>
WA-1,7,8,9 -- King	<i>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</i>
WI-1,4,9 -- Waukesha	<i>Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel</i>

## Appendix 2 - Explanation of Coding

For each major party candidate for office, I searched for articles mentioning the candidate using a variety of variations on his or her name. For example, in the Nebraska's 2<sup>nd</sup> district, I searched for Lee Terry on Lexis-Nexis in the following ways:

Congressman Lee Terry, Jr.  
Congressman Lee Terry  
Congressman Lee R. Terry, Jr.  
Congressman Lee R. Terry  
Representative Lee Terry, Jr.  
Representative Lee R. Terry, Jr.  
Representative Lee Terry

Representative Lee R. Terry  
Lee R. Terry, Jr. (R)  
Lee R. Terry (R)  
Lee Terry (R)  
Lee Terry  
Lee R. Terry

For the final two iterations of Terry's name, I read the entire article as a way of making sure the article was discussing the congressman. Similar searches were conducted on the World Wide Web for candidates who were covered in newspapers not found on the version of Lexis-Nexis purchased by Indiana University-Bloomington. Many split districts had online newspapers that did not have archives, nor were they available on Lexis-Nexis; they were excluded from the analysis. When searching on the web, I read as much of the article as possible (all that was available for free) to determine if the article was about the candidate. The articles did not have to address the candidacy of the candidate to be counted. For example, Shelley Kiel ran against Lee Terry in Nebraska's 2<sup>nd</sup> district. She was also a state senator during the 2000 year. Articles that mentioned her in the context of her work in Nebraska's Unicameral were counted as mentions (though all but one article did note she was running for Congress). Similarly, articles mentioning how Lee Terry voted on a national issue were also counted, even if they did not mention he was running for reelection. An article listing a man named "Lee Terry" as getting a hole-in-one on a golf course in the area was omitted, as there was no way to be sure it was the congressman who had the accurate 7-iron.

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