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## *Congressional Behavior and Electoral Marginality\**

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The "marginality" hypothesis maintains that members of Congress from marginal districts will display more moderation in their voting behavior than will those from safe districts. We give two alternative interpretations to the hypothesis: Candidates from more marginal districts will: (1) tend to converge to the positions of their constituents; and (2) tend to converge to the positions of their opponents. Employing policy opinion data on both party candidates for 299 districts for which valid competition figures could be obtained, and simulated constituency opinions for the same districts, we find a general tendency for candidates to diverge from each other in marginal districts. However, we find that in the more marginal districts, candidates closest to the constituency opinion are considerably more likely to win than their opponent—although quite the contrary is the case for the noncompetitive districts. Incumbents are found to have greater probability of winning reelection than their challengers even when the latter are closer to constituency opinion.

What difference, if any, do issues make in congressional elections? Hinckley (1976) finds little evidence of voting for congressional candidates on the basis of issues, but the view that the issue positions taken by candidates can affect their probability of winning or losing an election in particular kinds of districts remains widely held. The most common thesis is the "marginality hypothesis," which states that members from the most competitive districts are more likely to be "moderate" than are those from safe seats. Indeed, Fiorina (1973, p. 481) maintains that this thesis "is so well accepted that many undergraduate students probably learn it as part of the corpus of knowledge about the legislative process." There have been many studies of the marginality hypothesis (which are sum-

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marized in Fiorina, 1973),<sup>1</sup> some employing only roll-call data and others attempting to establish patterns of behavior according to the socioeconomic and demographic traits of the members' districts. The results of these analyses can best be described as mixed.

Part of the problem in coming to a firm conclusion on the marginality thesis has been conceptual. Most critical is the concept of "moderation," although we shall also argue that even "marginality" has not been as clearly delineated as it might be. The basic sources of difficulty in previous studies are: (1) socioeconomic and demographic variables are poor surrogates for constituency opinion for those studies employing these data (cf. Uslaner, 1976); and, more importantly, (2) comparison across members of Congress ignores the variation of opinion within the constituency that elects a given member. Comparing a "marginal" Democrat from Nebraska to a "safe" party member from either Mississippi or New York requires some heroic assumptions.

Some of the problems encountered in this analysis have been discussed by Fiorina (1973) as well as Miller (1964) and Achen (1977). The Miller and Achen studies are drawn from the larger Miller-Stokes study of representation which includes data on the issue positions of incumbent members of Congress, their challengers, their constituencies, and their perceptions of constituency attitudes. Such data are rare, however, and the particular set generally employed has been shown to yield quite misleading results unless unusual rigor is employed in treating the constituency data. To compensate for the lack of data availability, Fiorina (1973) examined the 42 districts which switched party control from the 88th Congress (in the wake of the 1964 Democratic landslide) by less than 55 percent of the vote and the 32 districts which similarly shifted from the 89th to the 90th Houses. As a basis for comparison, he also examined "safe-switch" districts which did shift parties from one election to the next, but by more than 55 percent of the vote. The most pronounced differences in roll-call behavior were found in "double marginal-switch" districts, thus shattering the "myth of marginality."

The important point behind Fiorina's analysis is the recognition (1973, p. 494) that "moderate relative to one's fellow legislators does

<sup>1</sup> The list of studies is quite long and can be found in Fiorina's (1973) article. Those dealing directly with Congress include Huntington (1950), Froman (1963), Erikson (1971), and Deckard (1976).

not logically imply 'moderate relative to one's constituency.'" The effect of this insight is to cast doubt upon virtually all previous studies of the marginality thesis. There are at least "two cultures": moderation relative to one's district and moderation relative to other members. Implicit in earlier work was the assumption that a test of the second thesis was also one of the first. Fiorina has effectively countered that argument. Hampered by problems of data availability on the same constituencies over time, his work leaves open yet a third arena: moderation relative to one's opponent (in either the primary or the general election, although we shall concentrate on the latter here).

How could such confusion have arisen? The answers are readily identified. Moderation relative to one's district and moderation relative to one's opponent may appear to be identical if we *assume* that candidates will adopt the policies favored by their constituents in order to win the election. Such an assumption is not necessarily warranted. If one candidate is committed to a relatively extreme position on the right, the opposing candidate could take a position *almost* as far away from the constituency mean *on either the right or the left* and still win the election. Both candidates would be considered to be "immoderate" relative to their constituencies; depending where the second candidate stood on the continuum, however, they might be very close to or very far away from one another. Similarly, one can confuse moderation relative to one's opponent with moderation relative to other members of Congress if the latter group is used as "surrogate" opposition candidates. Even without making this inferential leap, these latter concepts of moderation are similar in that neither makes any assumptions about the distribution of opinion *within a member's constituency*.

Whether members from safe seats display voting patterns different from those who come from more competitive districts may be an interesting question, but it does not have any implications for the study of representation or for the effects of issues on congressional elections. In this paper, we shall examine the *constituency convergence* and *candidate convergence* hypotheses. These hypotheses predict that as a district becomes more competitive: (1) the candidates should converge toward the mean position of their constituents; and (2) the issue positions of the two candidates should converge toward each other. We shall test the second hypothesis directly and proceed with a more indirect test of the constituency convergence thesis: Here we expect that the candidate closest to the constituency mean will win the election and that this relationship will be particularly pronounced for the more competitive districts.

### **Incumbents, Opponents, Constituents, and Marginality**

A valid test of the marginality hypothesis should include the following variables: (1) the incumbent's position on an issue or set of issues; (2) similar positions for the constituency; (3) similar positions for the *opponent*; and (4) a theoretically meaningful measure of marginality. Regarding (1), it is easy to derive the incumbent's position(s) from roll-call votes. This has been the traditional way of testing the hypothesis and will also be employed, partially, in this paper. Regarding (2), only the Miller study has examined constituency attitudes. The problem is simply one of data availability. Without the resources to sample in each member's constituency (or at least in a sample of them), estimates of district opinion have not been obtainable. We describe a technique below that allows us to estimate constituency opinion from national surveys, thus at least partially alleviating one difficulty with the previous research. Regarding (3), opponents' positions are even more difficult to obtain, as we have noted. Fiorina's study of "double switch" districts from the 88th to the 90th Congress is a creative attempt to cope with this problem, but it still cannot compare issue stands of candidates in a district in the same election. Furthermore, the turnover in members was rather high for both the 89th and 90th Congresses, and few GOP "freshmen" in the latter were former members of the 88th Congress. Finally, regarding (4), we shall argue below that measuring marginality only by the closeness of the vote in a congressional district may not be the most appropriate way to test the marginality hypothesis.

Our data on the positions of incumbents and their opponents consist of attitudinal measures for all candidates for the House of Representatives in 1966 in a survey conducted by *Congressional Quarterly* for the NBC News Election Unit. For incumbents, roll-call behavior during the 89th House was used, supplemented by questionnaires; nonincumbents were given questionnaires relating to the roll calls analyzed for members. The data set is complete: i.e., the response rate for nonincumbents was 100 percent and incumbents were queried about how they would have voted for votes on which they were absent. The questions asked and the roll calls employed fell into three general areas: foreign affairs, civil rights, and domestic programs; and these questions were chosen on the basis of what the substantively important issues likely to be considered by the 90th Congress would be.<sup>2</sup> Instead of employing the respondents'

<sup>2</sup> See Sullivan and O'Connor (1972) for a more detailed discussion of the data base.

answers to questions on each issue area, we chose to construct a more general liberal-conservative scale from the eight questions asked. We did so because an earlier study (Sullivan and O'Connor, 1972) indicates that the eight questions did indeed form a unidimensional scale, and the broader range of the scale (scores ranged from 8–24) permits us to make stronger comparisons across candidates and districts than would single issues.

Our method of deriving constituency opinion data is to simulate district results from national surveys, using a technique developed for the states by Weber and for state legislative districts by Schneider.<sup>3</sup> A previous study (Sullivan and Minns, 1976) provides validation of this simulation result for congressional districts as well. We shall not discuss the simulation methodology in detail since both the method and the validating results can be found in the sources cited (among others). Briefly, however, we employ national survey results to estimate the proportion of voters in each of the following categories who are liberal, moderate, or conservative on a particular proposal or general response: (1) size of place; (2) race; (3) ethnicity; (4) age; (5) education; (6) income; and (7) region. We thus have six social and economic variables producing a total of 193 combinations within each of five regions; this produces a total of 960 “voter-types” for use in the simulation. We then proceed with an additive model of aggregating district electorates by employing census data on the proportion of each district falling into each voter type and weighting that proportion by the various responses to the question posed.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of voters within a district that is liberal, moderate, or conservative thus becomes our indicator of constituency opinion. In this paper, we use the SRC’s 1966 Survey, and we simulate the constituency mean within each district on the “power of the federal government” question which asks respondents whether they feel the federal government has or has not become too powerful, or whether they have an opinion but fall into a middle category. We are constrained to use the 1966 survey because our candidate data are from 1966, and the 1966 survey did not include any self-identified liberal-conservative questions. Therefore, the question which comes closest as a sur-

<sup>3</sup> See Weber et al. (1972–1973), Weber (1972), Weber and Shaffer (1972), and Schneider (in press). Hinckley (1970) employs Weber’s estimates of party identification by state and compares them with available state polls. She concludes (p. 838) that the overall fit is very good.

<sup>4</sup> Respondents with no opinion have been omitted from this study.

rogate to the liberal-conservative dimension is the power of the federal government question.<sup>5</sup>

Before addressing the marginality hypothesis, we must delineate how we shall measure our variables. The candidate positions are derived from the scale scores. The constituency positions are derived from our simulation of the "power of the federal government" question, noted above, which is a mean score computed from a three point distribution for each constituency. Since we need to compare candidates' scores on the ideological continuum with that of their constituencies, we must transform the constituency distribution. Since the candidate scores range from 8 (extremely liberal) to 24 (extremely conservative) while the constituency scores range from one to three, we have simply multiplied the constituency score by eight, yielding the same range. When we do this, the constituency distribution (of mean scores) has a somewhat higher average score (15.4 for candidates vs. 16.8 for constituents, the latter more conservative) and a somewhat lower standard deviation (4.5 vs. 2) than the candidate distribution. This is to be expected, since it has been shown elsewhere (McClosky et al., 1960) that the elites of the two parties differ somewhat more in ideology than the mass supporters, producing a smaller standard deviation for the latter.

As we indicated above, the meaning of marginality has not received enough attention. The most common indicator of marginality has been the proportion of the two-party vote received by a candidate (or party) in the previous election: This would yield the 1964 election returns for our data set. Yet, it has also been argued (Erikson, 1971) that the causal flow may be reversed, i.e., the issue positions taken by the candidates in an election may influence their victory margin. This suggests that we should employ the 1966 election results. There is yet a third perspective on electoral security, which maintains that examination of a single election is not sufficient to make inferences about how secure a member is. A Representative may win with remarkable consistency if his (her) constituents are either committed Democrats or Republicans, with little if any swing

<sup>5</sup> Although the proportion of self-identified liberals, moderates, and conservatives saying the government is too big was changing between 1964 and 1968, the "size of government" question correlated quite highly with other domestic issues in both 1964 and 1968 but not in 1972 (Nie et al., 1976, pp. 124-128). Thus although the meaning of the question may have been changing, and it would clearly be an inappropriate measure of liberalism-conservatism now, this item is probably the best ideological surrogate from the 1966 survey. It correlated very highly with race and welfare items in both 1964 and 1966.

vote. Classic examples of such members include (prior to 1976) Lester Wolff (D-NY), who is now "safe" by any criterion, (before his unexpected defeat in 1974) Joel Broyhill (R-VA), and Mike McCormack (D-Wash). In such cases members are less likely to feel electoral reprisals based upon their voting records. In districts in which there is substantial fluctuation in voting patterns over a series of elections, or a great deal of volatility (cf. Sullivan and Minns, 1976), the prospects are greater for invoking electoral sanctions against candidates who stray too far from the district positions.<sup>6</sup>

We have obtained data for 1960, 1962, and 1964 House elections in which reapportionment shifts have been adjusted so that all results correspond to the 1966 district boundaries (Brownson, 1966). We eliminated those districts in which: (1) there were at-large elections prior to 1966; (2) the lack of comparability of districts made such computations impossible; and (3) one of the two major parties did not run a candidate in one or more of the previous elections. This reduces our sample size from 435 to 299. For the remaining districts, we have employed a measure of inter-party competition over a series of elections proposed by Meltz (1973). The index is defined as:

$$\Omega = 1 - [(\log(X) + 1)/2].$$

where  $X = (\mu - .5)/\sigma$ ; here  $\mu$  is the mean proportion of the majority party's votes and  $\sigma$  is the standard deviation over the set of elections. The higher the value of  $\Omega$ , the more competitive the district given our restricted data set (for a discussion of problems with the index in a more general context, see Uslaner, 1977). We thus shall employ three indicators of marginality: the 1964 and 1966 election results for the House and the composite index,  $\Omega$ .

### **Empirical Results**

As noted earlier, we interpret the marginality hypothesis to predict that in more competitive districts there is a greater tendency for the candidates to converge to the constituency mean, hence with each other. In other words, the ideological distance between candidates for Congress ought to be less in more competitive districts, and our measures of competitiveness ought to correlate with our measure of ideological distance (simply the absolute value of the difference on our liberalism-conservatism scale of

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Erickson (1976), where electoral security is shown not to be related to seniority *and* the potential for electoral defeat of a House member is shown to be quite real.



the major party candidates within each congressional district). The results are presented in Table 1.

We have coded all variables such that confirmation of the marginality hypothesis would result in a positive correlation between our measures of marginality and of candidate convergence. However, the correlations are *not* positive, with one being zero and the other two negative. The measure of closeness relative to volatility,  $\Omega$ , shows a weak negative correlation with candidate convergence. The correlation is so weak, however, that we should ignore it. As to the question of whether candidates place themselves on the ideological scale on the basis of past election returns or whether where they place themselves affects the election outcome, our data suggest that it is the glance backward that matters. It is equally clear, however, that the correlation is in the wrong direction: in districts which were most competitive in 1964, the candidates were less likely to converge than in districts which were least competitive. This is the opposite of the prediction made by the marginality hypothesis. We shall have more to say about this later, but for now we must emphasize that our conception of closeness relative to the volatility of the vote in past elections doesn't work.

The question then arises: Why do the districts which were close in 1964 provide candidates in 1966 who have a greater tendency to diverge ideologically than those districts which were not close in 1964? We shall return to this question shortly, but first we address the constituency convergence part of the marginality hypothesis. In competitive districts, the candidate closest to the constituency mean should win the election. The candidates must pay more attention to their constituents' issue positions if

TABLE 1  
Relationship Between Various Measures of  
Marginality and Candidate Convergence.<sup>a</sup>

	Candidate Convergence Scores	
	<i>r</i>	<i>b</i> ( <i>std. error b</i> )
1. $\Omega$	-.07	-.98 (.87)
2. 1964 Closeness of Vote	-.20	-.71 (.21)
3. 1966 Closeness of Vote	.00	.00 (—)

<sup>a</sup> All correlations are correlated for attenuation. The variables have been recoded so the marginality hypothesis predicts a positive correlation: the more "marginal" the district, the more the candidates ought to converge. The *b*'s are unstandardized regression coefficients.

they are from a marginal district because they fear electoral reprisals. This fear must be based partially in fact; i.e., they must have evidence to support the proposition that, in close districts, incumbents who stray will be defeated if their opponent is more in tune with the constituency on the issues.

We tested this prediction of the marginality hypothesis by computing the difference between each candidate's location on the liberal-conservative dimension and the constituency mean, predicting that in competitive districts, candidates closest to the constituency mean would win the election. On the basis of the 1964 election returns, we divided the districts (at the mean) into those that were highest on competitiveness and those that were lowest. The results are presented in Table 2, and they tend to support the marginality hypothesis.

It is interesting to note the extreme contrast between the more versus less marginal congressional districts. In the more marginal districts, where the candidates tend to diverge from each other somewhat more, 70 percent of the candidates *closest* to the constituency mean win the election; in the less marginal districts, where the candidates tend to converge somewhat more, 63 percent of the candidates *farthest* from the constituency mean win the election. Of course, in the latter districts, the candidate-constituency difference tends to be similar for both candidates because the candidates are closer together on the ideological continuum than in the former districts. Hence one might expect a lesser role for issues in these less com-

TABLE 2  
Marginality Hypothesis: Test of Prediction That  
Candidate Closest to Constituency Mean Will Win the Election<sup>a</sup>

Candidate Closest to Constituency Mean:	More Marginal Districts <sup>b</sup>	Less Marginal Districts
	Wins election	121 (70%)
Loses election	49 (29%)	80 (63%)
Candidates Converge	2 (1%)	5 (4%)
N =	172	127

<sup>a</sup> On our 16-point scale (scores range from 8–24), the average winner is 6 points closer to the constituency mean than is the average loser.

<sup>b</sup> Using only the first two rows of the table,  $\Phi = .36$ .

petitive districts (since issues do not sharply differentiate the candidates), and a greater role for other factors, such as partisanship and incumbency. On the other hand, in the more marginal districts, where candidates ought to converge on the issues but do not, issues appear to be very important. The voters have selected as a winner that candidate who best reflects constituency opinion. We therefore conclude that the marginality hypothesis is half right and half wrong: *Marginal districts do not produce candidates who converge toward each other, but they do elect that candidate who best reflects constituency preferences on the issues.* If candidates stray from the constituency mean, their opponents can use issues to win the election in marginal districts.

We return now to our earlier question. Why does the first prediction of the marginality hypothesis fare so poorly? Why don't candidates in marginal districts converge? Further, why does there appear to be an *opposite* tendency for candidates in districts that were marginal in the previous election to diverge more than in less marginal districts? There are several plausible answers. First, the fault may lie with the challengers. The incumbents have already staked out some sort of position on the liberal-conservative continuum before the campaign even begins. Although they can modify their stance somewhat, within narrow bounds, between elections or between Washington and their home district, these bounds are not completely elastic. The challenger thus faces an incumbent with some sort of record, and must decide whether to converge or diverge from the incumbent's position on the ideological spectrum. In nonmarginal districts, it may not matter much whether the challenger converges or diverges—the power of party preference and incumbency is just too great. On the other hand, in marginal districts, issues may be used strategically to garner that small advantage that may mean victory. The election is likely to be close, at least based upon the results of the previous election, and the careful use of issue positions may make a critical difference.

But let us back up a bit. Before running against the incumbent, challengers must get their party's nomination. Since the prior election was close, the nomination is likely to be highly valued and not lightly given or easily earned. The potential challengers must satisfy first the members of their party who are active in the endorsement and/or primary election system.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> That is, the failure of candidates to converge may simply indicate that each candidate is attempting to win the votes of his (her) most loyal supporters in a constituency. For some evidence on this in the Senate, see Markus (1974). This is also an optimal campaign strategy, as maintained by Kramer (1966).

And, since prior research has shown that party activists tend to be somewhat more ideologically extreme than nonactivists,<sup>8</sup> the nomination process in competitive districts may result in challengers who are at the ideological mean within their own party, but *not* within the district. Thus they differ from the incumbent more than in noncompetitive districts and they also differ from the constituency mean more than the incumbent, who need not worry so much about obtaining the party nomination.

A second plausible explanation of the negative correlation in Table 1 is just that it is random or at most, unimportant. The size of the correlation is small, and it is from congressional districts at one rather atypical point in time. In order to provide some evidence that the correlation is not a result of random processes (of course, with an  $N$  of 299 it is statistically significant) or of the particular election units we are using, we replicated our analysis, to the extent possible, using the 29 states that had contested Senate elections in 1966.<sup>9</sup> For several reasons we have not replicated the same measurement procedures used on congressional districts. It is not clear exactly where Senators and their challengers will look in order to determine whether the seat in question is marginal or not. Senators are up for reelection so infrequently that we cannot go back three elections to compute  $\Omega$ ; we could go back to the last time they faced the electorate, but that would have been six years prior, and we felt that was simply too long. As a substitute we decided to rely on general measures of competitiveness in the American states. We therefore assume that Senators and Senate candidates rely primarily on their judgment of whether statewide elections are generally marginal. Thus we use the competitiveness index of Dawson and Robinson (1963). We also correlate ideological distance with the 1966 outcome, again to examine the possibility that distance affects competitiveness rather than vice versa. The

<sup>8</sup> On this thesis with respect to congressional elections, Jeff Fishel (1973, pp. 84–88) found that Republican congressional *challengers*, but not their Democratic counterparts, who had held no public office before were more likely to be ideologues than those with prior service. Note, however, that Fishel's data are based upon challengers, not incumbents—thus limiting the inferences one can make to our data set even though both are based upon candidates running for election to the 90th House.

<sup>9</sup> Actually, 36 Senate seats were at stake in 1966. Three states (Michigan, South Carolina, and Virginia) had special elections in addition to regular elections. Our data set did not include Michigan, but we employed only the regular elections from the latter states. (The results would not be altered if we had used the special elections). The data set had no competition scores for the Alaska race, so this was dropped from the analysis. Finally, we excluded the uncontested races in Arkansas, Georgia, and Louisiana—consistent with our procedure for the House.

corrected correlation between competitiveness and convergence is  $-.41$  for Dawson and Robinson's index and  $-.12$  for the 1966 election results. Again, the correlations are in the wrong direction—the more marginal states produce candidates who converge less than the candidates in non-marginal states. Also, the correlation for prior competitiveness with convergence is greater than that between convergence and subsequent election outcomes. The results are consistent with those in the House districts and they prompt us to reject the second explanation, that our results are random or so weak as to be meaningless. Something systematic is going on here, and we must attempt to discover why.

We return to our earlier speculations about the role of primary elections and the nomination process, but we do so indirectly. Perhaps the

TABLE 3

Role of Issues in Defeating Incumbents:  
More vs. Less Marginal Districts<sup>c</sup>

<i>Candidate Closer to the Constituency Mean:</i>			
	Incumbent Closer	Challenger Closer	Candidates Converge
A. <i>Marginal Districts</i> <sup>a</sup>			
1. Incumbent Wins	78 (91%)	40 (59%)	1 (100%)
2. Incumbent Loses	8 (9%)	28 (41%)	0 (0%)
	N = 86	68	1
B. <i>Nonmarginal Districts</i> <sup>b</sup>			
1. Incumbent Wins	36 (95%)	74 (99%)	5 (100%)
2. Incumbent Loses	2 (5%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
	N = 38	75	5

<sup>a</sup> There were 17 marginal districts without an incumbent running. In 16 of those 17 districts, the candidate closest to the constituency mean won.

<sup>b</sup> There were 9 nonmarginal districts without an incumbent running. In 5 of those 9 districts, the candidate closest to the constituency mean won.

<sup>c</sup> Using only the first two columns,  $\Phi = .37$  for A and  $\Phi = -.11$  for B.

most light can be shed on this entire problem by asking the simple question: What is the most effective strategy the challenger can use, with respect to issues? To put it a slightly different way, what role do issues play in defeating incumbents? Some interesting evidence, presented in Table 3, suggests that issues play a considerable role in marginal districts. Looking first at marginal districts, about nine out of ten incumbents who are closer to the constituency mean win reelection in spite of the closeness of the prior vote. On the other hand, only about six out of ten incumbents who are farther from the constituency mean than the challenger win reelection. In nonmarginal districts, almost all incumbents win reelection regardless of whether they or their challengers are closer to the constituency mean. Put another way, the challengers' best strategy is to live in a marginal district and to place themselves closer to the constituency's preferences; even then, their chances of winning appear to be considerably less than 50-50. This suggests that issues *can* play a role in unseating incumbents, but it also suggests that the incumbency advantage is considerable even in marginal districts; *and* if the incumbent should already have staked out an ideological position close to the constituency mean the power of incumbency is almost insurmountable even in these marginal districts. To buttress these points, one need only examine marginal districts in which there is no incumbent running for reelection. In 16 of 17 such districts (94 percent), the candidate closest to the constituency mean wins the election, suggesting that were it not for the power of incumbency, issues would perhaps play a decisive role in marginal districts.

### **Incumbency, Issues, and Seniority: Marginality Reappraised**

Before we attribute too much importance to the candidates' issue stands, we should consider another factor in the representation of constituency opinion which has been implicit in every study of this linkage but never analyzed: seniority. The marginality hypothesis has assumed that members who represent marginal districts should be most likely to mirror their constituents' positions. Yet, such a thesis assumes that members know what these views are. The more senior that members become, however, the more likely they will know what constituent sentiment actually is. Perhaps the results we observe in Table 3 are artifacts of seniority inasmuch as incumbents with higher levels of seniority are likely to better reflect constituency opinion because of their superior seniority, not issue positions. Along with seniority come two things: better representa-

TABLE 4

Role of Issues in Defeating Incumbents, Controlling for Seniority<sup>a</sup>*Candidate Closer to Constituency Mean:*

	Incumbent Closer	Challenger Closer	Candidates Converge
<b>A. Marginal Districts</b>			
1. <i>High Seniority</i>			
a. Incumbent Wins	49 (92%)	17 (77%)	1 (100%)
b. Incumbent Loses	4 (8%)	5 (23%)	0 (0%)
2. <i>Low Seniority</i>			
a. Incumbent Wins	29 (88%)	23 (50%)	0
b. Incumbent Loses	4 (12%)	23 (50%)	0
<b>B. Nonmarginal Districts</b>			
1. <i>High Seniority</i>			
a. Incumbent Wins	30 (94%)	57 (100%)	4 (100%)
b. Incumbent Loses	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2. <i>Low Seniority</i>			
a. Incumbent Wins	6 (100%)	17 (94%)	1 (100%)
b. Incumbent Loses	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	1 (0%)

<sup>a</sup> Using only the first two columns, the  $\Phi$ 's are: for A1,  $\Phi = .21$ ; for A2,  $\Phi = .39$ ; for B1,  $\Phi = -.12$ ; and for B2,  $\Phi = .12$ .

tion of constituency preferences and a better chance of reelection due to the well known advantages of high public office. Thus the relationship between issue positions and reelection chances in marginal districts could be spurious, and the common cause could easily be seniority. We therefore need to examine the role of issues controlling for seniority.

When we examine the partial correlations between candidate con-

vergence and our measures of volatility and marginality, the coefficients in Table 1 above are virtually unchanged. Furthermore, in Table 4 we present data which allow us to examine simultaneously the role of marginality and seniority in determining whether incumbents' issue positions can be used to unseat them. We shall confine our discussion to the contingency table results in the latter table because we believe that a regression analysis is generally inappropriate to our concerns.<sup>10</sup>

When we examine the 273 districts, we find that the challenger has a 50-50 chance of defeating the incumbent if: (1) the district is marginal; (2) the challenger adopts issue positions closer to the constituency mean than the incumbent; and (3) the incumbent has served less than six years in the House. If *any* of these three conditions is not present, the challenger's chances drop dramatically. For example, if the first two conditions hold but not the third (low seniority), only 23 percent of the challengers win. If the district is marginal and the incumbent has little seniority but adopts policy stances closer to his constituents than his (her) opponent, only 12 percent of the challengers win. For nonmarginal districts in which the challenger is closer to constituency opinion and the incumbent has low seniority, then we find that only six percent of the incumbents lose.

To assess the relative impact of these three conditions, note first that only 14 percent of all incumbents in our analysis lose. Fully 99 percent of the members from nonmarginal districts win reelection. For marginal districts, 34 percent of the incumbents with low seniority lose, compared to 41 percent of the members who stray from the positions on issues of their constituents. Issues seem to have a somewhat greater impact on defeating incumbents than does seniority, but both are clearly important. While only eight percent of incumbents closer to district opinion lose, compared to seven percent of the high seniority members,

<sup>10</sup> We did not run a regression model with the full range of scores on our independent variables because this leads to uninterpretable interaction terms, excessively high multicollinearity, and a distortion of the theory underlying our conception of seniority, issue positions, and marginality. We did, however, run a regression analysis using dichotomies as independent variables (as in Table 4), and percentage of the vote for the incumbent as the dependent variable. The results are: % Vote Incumbent = 65.2 + 1.06 Seniority - .02 Issues - 2.1 Competitiveness - 3.8 Seniority × Issues - 2.1 Seniority × Competitiveness - 6.0 Issues × Competitiveness + .07 Seniority × Issues × Competitiveness. The largest effects are associated with the interaction between seniority and issues, and between issues and competitiveness. Thus, parallel with our discussion in the text, there are no large main effects, and all three variables are important in an interactive sense. More details are available from the authors.



we find that 20 percent of incumbents are defeated when their challengers are closer to constituency opinion and 27 percent of members with low seniority go down to defeat. These latter findings seem to indicate that seniority is a more critical variable than issue positions in defeating incumbents, contrary to our earlier findings and expectations.

The difference in results can of course be traced to the effects of the most powerful determinant of electoral security: the marginality of the district. In nonmarginal districts, the challenger does not have much of a chance to unseat the incumbent regardless of issue positions espoused by the incumbent or of the member's seniority. For such districts, we find that two-thirds of all incumbents are farther from their constituents' positions than are their challengers. Yet incumbents prevail on election day anyway. Indeed, we found 57 nonmarginal districts in which the incumbent was high on seniority but the challenger was closer to the constituency mean on the issues—and in all 57 instances the incumbent won. Rarely have we seen such a clear result in social science research.

If issue positions are posited to have a greater impact upon congressional elections than seniority, it is in the marginal districts where such an effect is found. Yet, we stress that each of the three conditions of marginality, issue proximity, and seniority constitutes a necessary but not sufficient condition for unseating an incumbent. The effects of seniority cannot be dismissed, but they are not traceable to the greater correspondence of members' positions with constituency attitudes for more senior members. Members from nonmarginal districts are twice as likely to have six or more years of congressional service than a Representative selected at random from our 299 districts. In such districts, the Representative can build a firm basis for reelection by constituency service early in his (her) career and continue to serve in the Congress for many years (cf. Fiorina, 1977). If the member is successful in this task, he (she) can turn inward toward the politics of the House and take issue stands which will be of little concern to the folks back home as long as the casework is handled (cf. Uslaner, 1978). Otherwise, the potential for defeat on the issues cannot be discounted. The challenger thus has a difficult task in attempting to unseat an incumbent, and we note that in most elections the situation may be even more troublesome for a challenger because so many of the 1964 freshmen came from marginal districts and 1966 was a year in which an unusually high number of incumbents was unseated. Satchel Paige cautioned, "Don't look back. Some[one] may be gaining on you." This may be good advice in baseball, but it is not necessarily so in politics. In some cases, the members may indeed need to

look back to constituency opinions to stave off defeat. It is more likely, however, that the effort would only be wasted since the challenger is not gaining much.

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