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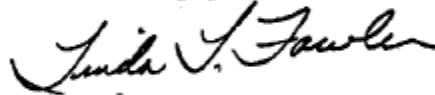
September 23, 1977

Professor Heinz Eulau
Board of Overseers
National Election Studies
P.O. Box Z
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Professor Eulau:

Enclosed is a memorandum regarding possible future research on Congressional elections. I hope the ideas are suitable for inclusion in the conference at the University of Rochester, October 27-28.

Sincerely yours,



Linda L. Fowler
Assistant Professor

SEP 29 1977

MEMORANDUM

Research on Congressional Elections

Linda L. Fowler

Syracuse University

Among the many explanations offered for the reelection success of incumbent Representatives is Tufte's contention that safe seats have become increasingly prevalent.¹ Whether this phenomenon is attributable to gerrymandering by state legislatures or natural population movements, it is undeniable that major shifts in the partisan vote produce only marginal changes in the number of seats controlled by the two parties.² In New York State only four of 39 districts were found to have relatively even distributions in party registration, with an average divergence of 33 percent.³ Party proved an exceedingly good predictor of the New York Congressional vote⁴ in spite of an overall declining trend.⁵ In addition, party identification has retained its close correspondence with a voter's choice of Representative, in marked contrast to voter decisions about other offices.⁶ Thus, many members of Congress appear to be insulated from the vicissitudes of public opinion by virtue of representing a one-party district.

It is likely that partisan dominance of a district is associated with an underlying consensus about issues and values. Fenno has noted that members of Congress perceive their districts in terms of heterogeneity or homogeneity along various dimensions of ethnicity, wealth, occupation and so forth.⁷ The political significance of such groupings depends upon:

"the ease with which the congressman finds a lowest common denominator of interests for some large proportion of his geographical constituency."⁸

The link between district homogeneity and electoral safeness is the basis for Fiorina's theory of representation; in a homogeneous district both maximizing and maintaining roll-call strategies always exist which protect a Representative's electoral margin, whereas this is generally not the case for the heterogeneous district.⁹ In Downsian terms, the potential for a coalition of minorities is only a problem in the latter constituency.¹⁰

Other findings in the literature suggest an intriguing connection between the diversity of constituency opinion and political representation. Miller's findings that Representatives from one-party districts were more accurate in their perceptions of district views and more likely to vote in accordance with the majority preference offer some support for the idea that homogeneous districts are "easier" to represent and hence more likely to remain safe.¹¹ McCrone and Kuklinski indicate that state legislators require consistent cues on issues to perform as delegates¹² and, presumably, consistency declines as district heterogeneity increases.

Preliminary results that I have obtained fitting various curvilinear functions to district income data reveal distinctive patterns of electoral competition for various types of distribution. Like many other scholars,¹³ I am unhappy using this type of aggregate data because it assumes that the Representative and constituent alike see the district as an undifferentiated mass.

In addition, heterogeneity is undoubtedly of lesser importance on matters of low salience, but this relationship can only be guessed at on the basis of present information. Given the importance of district characteristics to our overall understanding of electoral competition and the inconclusive findings so far, it is proposed that the SRC undertake:

- 1) An in-depth survey of voter attitudes in a stratified sample of Congressional districts;
- 2) That respondents determine the salience of issues on which homogeneity/heterogeneity is to be estimated;
- 3) That attitudes reflect at least a seven point scale, so that the distribution of opinion can be approximated mathematically;¹⁴
- 4) That voters be asked to make some judgments about the nature of their Representative's coalition and whether they consider themselves to be in it.

I believe that the type of information outlined above will allow political scientists to make some firm judgments about the nature of electoral competition at the Congressional level, particularly whether alternative coalitions are even possible in the majority of districts. I would contend also that until that basic question is answered it is pointless to argue about the relative importance of such factors as campaign resources, recognition, constituency casework or utilization of incumbency as a voting cue in shaping the eventual outcome. Finally, I would hope that such attitude data could be used to test the usefulness of socio-economic variables, such as income, as surrogates for constituency opinion in other types of

research, such as the impact of economic conditions.¹⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. Edward Tufte, "The Relationship Between Seats and Votes in Two-Party Systems," APSR, 68 (June, 1973), 531-546.
2. Ibid., p. 541-3.
3. Linda L. Fowler, "The Electoral Lottery: Decisions to Run for Congress," Prepared for delivery at the 1976 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, The Palmer House, Chicago, Illinois, September 2-5, 1976, p. 26.
4. Ibid., p. 27.
5. See Warren Lee Kostroski, "Party and Incumbency in Postwar Senate Elections: Trends, Patterns and Models," APSR, 67 (December, 1973), 1213-31; and John Ferejohn, "On the Decline of Competition in Congressional Elections," APSR, 71 (March, 1977), 166-76.
6. Norman Nie et al, The Changing American Voter (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 51.
7. Richard F. Fenno, Jr., "Congressmen in Their Constituencies: An Exploration," APSR (forthcoming), p. 4.
8. Ibid., p. 5.
9. Morris P. Fiorina, Representatives, Roll Calls and Constituencies (Boston: Lexington Books, 1974), Chapter 3.
10. Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), pp. 56-59.
11. Warren Miller, "Majority Rule and the Representative System of Government," in E. Allardt and Stein Rokkan (eds.), Mass Politics (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 284-311.
12. Donald McCrone and James Kuklinski, "The Delegate Theory of Representation," Prepared for presentation at the 1977 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 1-4, pp. 17-20.
13. See David Seidman, "Simulation of Public Opinion: A Caveat," Public Opinion Quarterly, 38 (1975), 331-342; Aage Clausen, How Congressmen Decide (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1973), pp. 126-36. John E. Jackson found a substantial constituency effect in Senatorial elections using aggregate data, see Constituencies and Leaders in Congress (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

14. This was done successfully by Aldrich and McElvey using multidimensional scaling. See John H. Aldrich and Richard D. McElvey, "A Method of Scaling with Applications to the 1968 and 1972 Presidential Elections," APSR, 71 (March, 1977), 111-130.
15. See Gerald Kramer, "Short-term Fluctuations in U. S. Voting Behavior, 1896-1964," APSR, 65 (March, 1971), 131-43.