

Executive Summary

FairVote's Monopoly Politics is a biennial project that predicts the results of U.S. House elections. The project's consistent accuracy (in other words, the fact that election outcomes are predictable) demonstrates the lack of competition in general elections. To that end, Monopoly Politics can help us understand our lack of voter efficacy and the dysfunction we see in Congress.

When most congressional districts are decidedly Republican or Democratic, representatives are not accountable to their general electorates; if they have the dominant party's label next to their name on the ballot, they are essentially guaranteed to win. Obtaining this label is increasingly a function of one's ability to mirror their primary voters and the national party ideologically rather than a function of incumbency, name recognition, or voting record. With the number of "safe" districts on the rise, this is increasingly the dynamic in most House elections. Other consequences include a lack of "crossover" representatives, an increasingly nationalized political environment, and a lack of incentive for long-term problem solving.

Though we can attribute the increase in "safe" districts in part to redistricting, the problem is (to an extent) unavoidable under single-member districts. FairVote proposes the [Fair Representation Act \(FRA\)](#) as one solution. With a combination of multi-member districts and proportional ranked choice voting, the FRA would make every congressional district competitive and every vote matter. Further, by allowing intra-party competition in the general election, representatives would have to compete on policy and experience rather than partisanship alone.

▶ 25 YEARS OF MONOPOLY POLITICS

Monopoly Politics is a biennial project conducted before each election cycle to predict the results of all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Monopoly Politics methodology was pioneered by FairVote in 1997 and serves as a forerunner to the Cook Partisan Voting Index. The project demonstrates that most House seats are all but decided well before Election Day, leaving many voters essentially powerless at the ballot box.

Monopoly Politics derives its predictive power from relying solely on past voting patterns to make its predictions, rather than considering polling data or other inputs that can capture more transitory changes. See the appendix for a detailed description of methodology.

In 2020, Monopoly Politics demonstrated astounding predictive success. Ahead of the 2020 elections, we projected 357 seats with high confidence, accounting for 82% of all seats. Monopoly Politics correctly projected 356 of those seats - a 99.7% accuracy rate - based solely on each district's voting history.

Even in 2018, an extremely volatile year for partisan based projections, Monopoly Politics posted a 97% accuracy rate in its predictions. Our high confidence projections were over 99% accurate for five of the last six election cycles.

Monopoly Politics proves that in our system of non-competitive single-winner districts, traditional party preference reigns supreme in determining the vast majority of election outcomes. As crossover representatives grow rarer, voters are falling into patterns of partisanship to elect their representatives, regardless of political experience or name recognition.

Nominees from the dominant party in hyper-partisan districts are essentially guaranteed to win the general election, and therefore need not appeal to the wishes of the general electorate. The only test they need to pass is with party primary voters.

The result is a polarized system where candidates are rewarded for adopting hyper-partisan platforms, particularly in hyper-partisan districts, instead of championing popular policies and bipartisan compromise that benefit all.

We present the Fair Representation Act (FRA) as one solution to "monopoly politics." By establishing multi-member congressional districts and electing representatives via ranked-choice voting, general elections would be competitive. The FRA holds House members accountable to their broad constituencies and incentivizes candidates to compete on their records and policy as opposed to partisanship alone.

▶ THE MONOPOLY POLITICS METHODOLOGY

The heart of Monopoly Politics lies in our approach to measuring partisanship, and it is a simple approach: we measure how much the two major party presidential candidates over- or under-performed in each district compared to their margin in the national popular vote. Therefore, when our predictions are successful, we demonstrate a connection between partisanship and electoral outcomes.

Our projections use district partisanship as a baseline and then apply a modifier for if an incumbent is seeking re-election (due to incumbency advantage) and a modifier for the national two-party preference. (In 2020, the national two-party modifier was 4.54% because Democrat Joe Biden earned 4.54% more votes nationally than Republican Donald Trump.)

We classify the confidence level of our projection based on the projected margin of victory. If a seat is projected to be won by at least 12 percentage points in a 50-50 year, it is classified as a “safe seat” with a high level of confidence. These high confidence projections usually constitute over 80% of the total seats. The ability to project more than four out of five seats without knowing anything about the candidates, their campaigns, or the nature of the year, with a high degree of success, is a powerful demonstration of how winner-take-all elections have effectively removed most representatives from any sort of accountability to general election voters. For most candidates, once they have won their party’s nomination on the general election ballot (that is, if they are in the district’s dominant party), they have essentially won the seat. All they had to do was make their case to a small number of primary voters first.

The decennial redistricting cycle impacted this year’s Monopoly Politics release in two ways.

First, redistricting delayed our projections by over a year while we waited for state legislators and independent commissions to draw new districts. In the past, Monopoly Politics was published roughly 20 months prior to congressional elections to illustrate the strength of our predictive methodology and the unchanging nature of House elections when partisanship has become so dominant. This year, redistricting caused us to delay publication until just four months prior to election day.

Second, we discounted the incumbent modifier for incumbent members of Congress whose districts were dramatically transformed. The incumbent modifier accounts for the characteristics that give an advantage to sitting Representatives, such as name recognition, relationships with local stakeholders in their district, an experienced campaign team, and an existing fundraising apparatus. Even incumbents running in almost-entirely-redrawn districts will retain some of those benefits, if not all. As such, we create a discount to the incumbent modifier based on the amount of overlap between their old district and their newly-drawn district.

See the appendix for a more detailed description of the Monopoly Politics methodology.

▶ 2022 PROJECTIONS

This year, we project 349 seats with high confidence, or 80% of seats. We have classified only 86 districts as possibly competitive. Of those 86 competitive seats, we make lower-confidence projections for 47 seats which we call “lean” seats, where the expected margin is six points or less, leaving only 39 seats as true “toss-ups.”

In a default year, that is, a year where the national partisan preference is 50% Democratic and 50% Republican, we project an eight-seat edge for Republicans with 202 seats, compared to 194 for Democrats. This figure includes “safe” and “lean” seats.

The map below shows our high-confidence projections in dark red (“safe Republican”) and dark blue (“safe Democrat”). Our lower-confidence projections are in light red and light blue, while “toss-up seats” are shown in purple.

FIGURE 1: PROJECTIONS BY DISTRICT

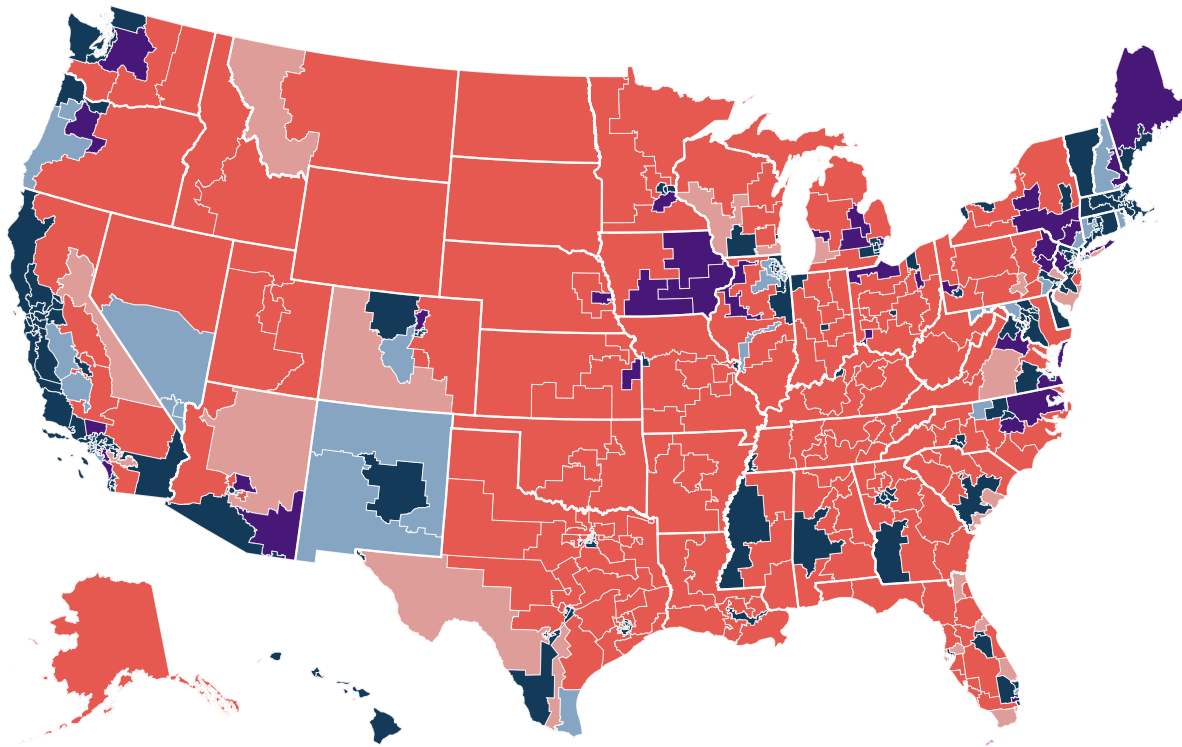
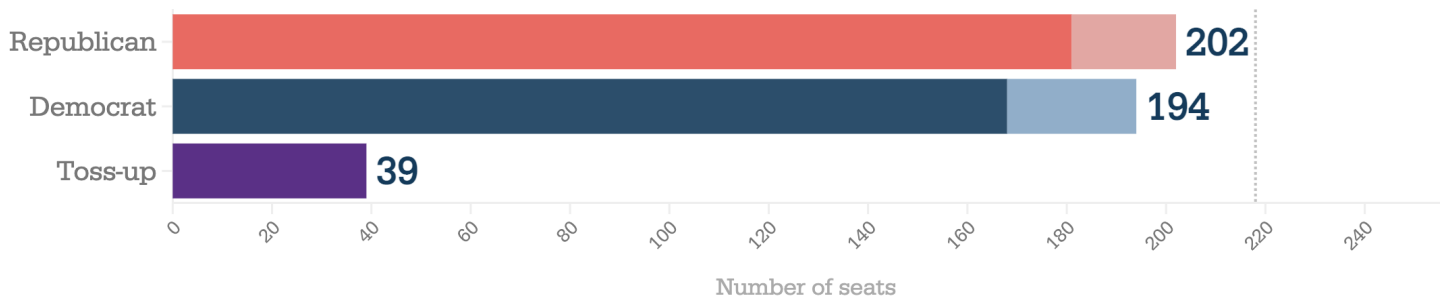


FIGURE 2: SEATS PER PARTY IN A 50-50 YEAR



An interactive version of this map is available at www.fairvote.org/monopoly_politics.

▶ FEW SEATS WITH VACANCIES

Only 13% of congressional seats have vacancies, or 56 seats. Nearly half of vacant seats are projected to be somewhat competitive, making them more competitive than the House as a whole. Even so, a majority of vacant seats still have high confidence projections for one party. In most of these districts, one party is nearly guaranteed a victory regardless of the candidates chosen in party primaries, limiting the ability of general election voters to impact the outcome.

Nine vacant seats occurred because redistricting created a district with no incumbent. The remaining seats are vacant due to incumbent retirements. Five incumbents are retiring from districts that favor the other party. Another six are retiring from “toss-up” districts. The remaining retirements will likely lead to another member of the same party holding that seat.

FIGURE 3: RETIRING INCUMBENTS IN COMPETITIVE DISTRICTS OR DISTRICTS FAVORING THE OPPOSING PARTY

District	Retiring Incumbent	Retiring Incumbent's Party	2022 Projection
FL-07	Stephanie Murphy	D	LEAN R
FL-13	Charlie Crist	D	LEAN R
IL-17	Cheri Bustos	D	TOSS-UP
NC-01	G.K. Butterfield	D	TOSS-UP
NY-01	Lee Zeldin	R	TOSS-UP
NY-03	Thomas Suozzi	D	TOSS-UP
NY-19	Antonio Delgado	D	TOSS-UP
OH-13	Tim Ryan	D	TOSS-UP
PA-17	Connor Lamb	D	TOSS-UP
TN-05	Jim Cooper	D	SAFE R
WI-03	Ron Kind	D	LEAN R

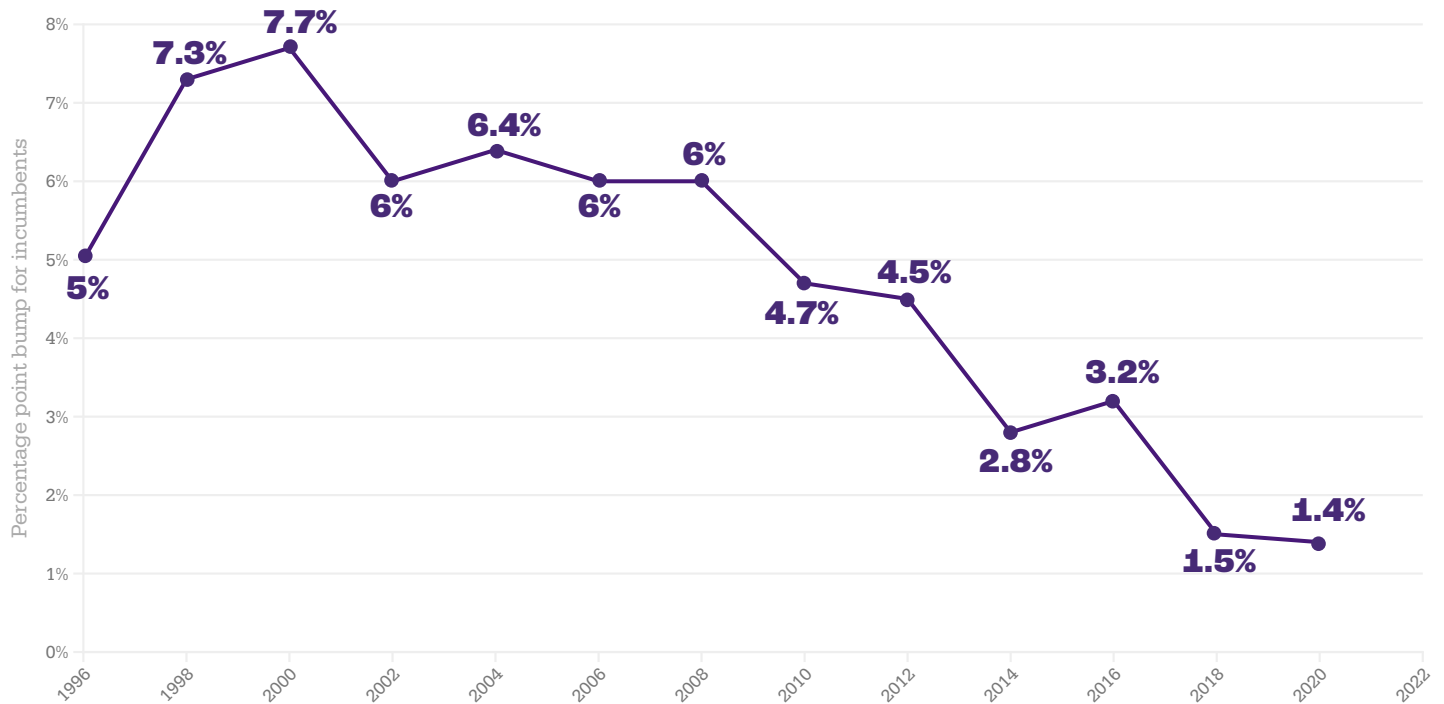
▶ THE OUTLOOK FOR INCUMBENT REPRESENTATIVES

While vacancies can lead to more competitive elections in individual districts, congressional retirements are still rare, meaning nearly nine in ten seats will be contested by an incumbent Representative in 2022.

Monopoly Politics' methodology assumes that incumbents have an inherent electoral advantage, but our data shows that this advantage is diminishing over time. The “incumbency bump” gauges how much voters favor their incumbent representatives nationally. The incumbency bump is the mean of two values – the median overperformance of Democratic incumbents relative to district partisanship, averaged with the median overperformance of Republican incumbents.

The incumbency bump has declined steadily since its peak in 2000, hitting an all-time low in 2020 of 1.4%. Our default projections for 2022 assume the incumbency bump will decline again, to a new low of 1.3%.

FIGURE 4: INCUMBENCY ADVANTAGE HAS DECLINED OVER TIME



This decades-long decline reinforces that factors other than partisanship are losing their importance. For example, in a safely partisan district, voters are almost as willing to embrace a newcomer as they are to continue supporting a long-time incumbent. For instance, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez famously defeated long-time incumbent Joseph Crowley in the Democratic primary for New York’s 14th congressional district in 2018. The sitting Representative’s congressional record and name recognition matter far less than their ability to mirror the partisan ideology of their primary voters. This report takes no position on whether a declining incumbency bump is a positive for our democracy, but highlights it as a key trend over the last several decades.

There are 15 districts where our full projections indicate that the incumbent’s party is not favored to win in a “default 50-50 year.” We consider these the most vulnerable incumbents. They include seven Democrats and eight Republicans.

Only one of these incumbents is in a district with a high-confidence projection: Al Lawson (D) faces a strongly Republican electorate in Florida’s 5th district.

FIGURE 5: VULNERABLE INCUMBENTS

District	Incumbent Name	Incumbent Party	Default Porjection (Dem %)	Party Projection
AZ-02	Tom O'Halleran	D	46%	LEAN R
CA-22	David Valadao	R	54%	LEAN D
CA-27	Mike Garcia	R	52%	TOSS-UP
CA-45	Michelle Steel	R	51%	TOSS-UP
FL-02	Al Lawson	D	41%	SAFE R
FL-21	Lois Frankel	D	45%	LEAN R
FL-25	Mario Díaz-Balart	R	53%	TOSS-UP
IA-03	Cindy Axne	D	49%	TOSS-UP
NJ-07	Tom Malinowski	D	48%	TOSS-UP
NM-02	Yvette Herrell	R	53%	LEAN D
OH-01	Steve Chabot	R	52%	TOSS-UP
OH-09	Marcy Kaptur	D	50%	TOSS-UP
PA-07	Susan Wild	D	50%	TOSS-UP
TX-34	Mayra Flores	R	56%	LEAN D

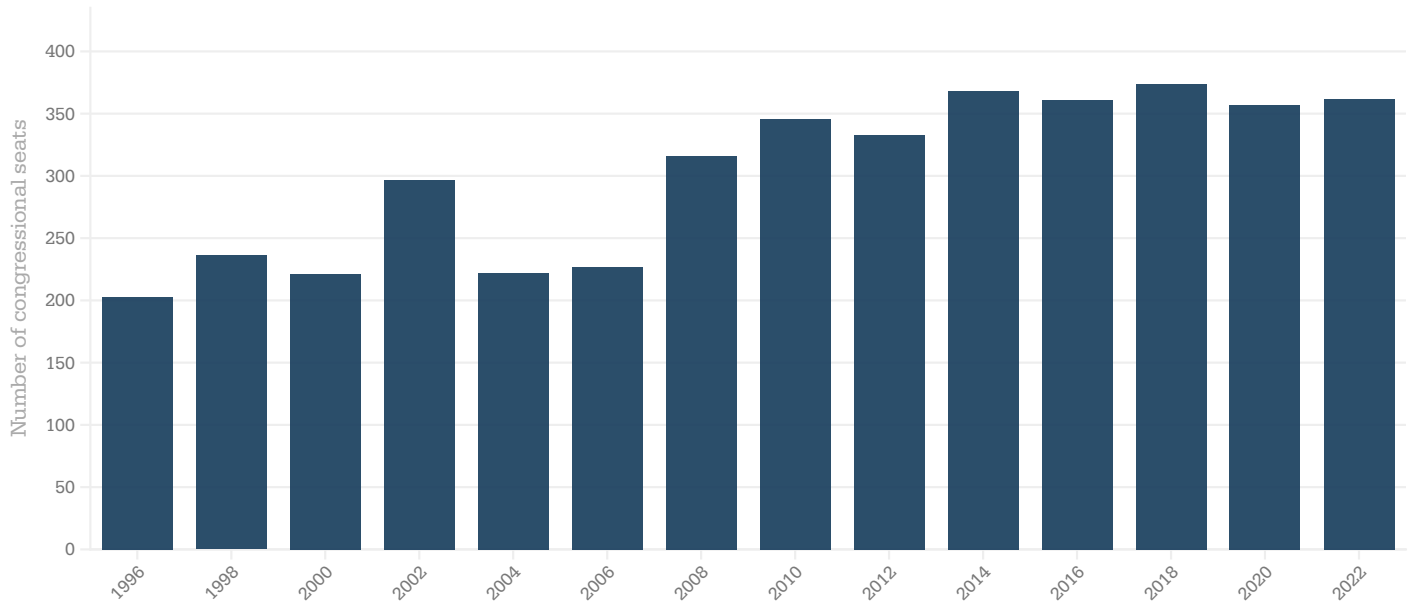
▶ REDISTRICTING EXPEDITED THE DECLINE OF COMPETITIVE DISTRICTS

The number of competitive congressional districts has trended downward over the last two years. A mixture of residential sorting and partisan gerrymandering contribute to our polarization trends and voters are left behind, fewer and fewer of them seeing meaningful competition on their November ballots.

FairVote's methodology makes high-confidence projections for 347 seats this year. We have classified only 88 districts as possibly competitive, including 39 "toss-up" seats (projected margin of six points or less) and 49 "lean" seats (where one party is favored by 6-12 points).

The chart below shows how the Monopoly Politics methodology has made high-confidence projections in more seats over the years, as more districts become so "safe" that they are virtually certain to go to one party.

FIGURE 6: HIGH-CONFIDENCE PROJECTIONS OVER TIME



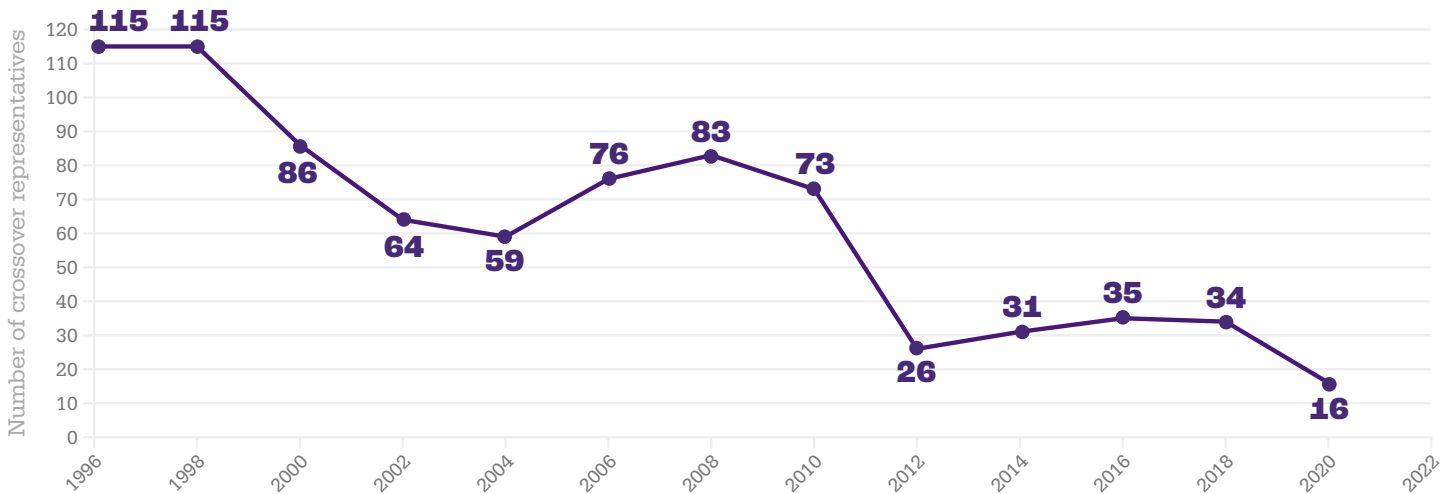
► **NUMBER OF CROSSOVER REPRESENTATIVES COULD BE AN ALL-TIME LOW, AND NATIONALIZATION OF POLITICS AN ALL-TIME HIGH**

Crossover representatives are House members whose district voted for a different party for president than for Congress. Over the past decades, the number of crossover districts has steadily decreased.

This, as well as the fact that presidential results have proved to be an excellent indicator of district-level partisanship (and therefore congressional race results), helps demonstrate the nationalization of politics. Because party primaries are increasingly the decisive election for most House seats, representatives are increasingly accountable to the national partisan environment rather than local issues.

During the elections of 2020, a total of 16 representatives won in crossover districts in 12 different states, nine Republicans winning in Democratic districts and seven Democrats winning in Republican districts.

FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF CROSSOVER REPRESENTATIVES OVER TIME



Of the 12 states, California had the most wins in crossover representation. All four of its crossover district representatives were Republicans who won in traditional Democratic districts. With California being one of the biggest players in the agricultural industry, it is no surprise that one of these wins included David Valadao, a member of the House Agriculture Committee who now represents the 21st district (a rare victory for local-issue politics). Mike Garcia also won as a crossover representative in the 25th district for the 2020 elections. Crossover wins also included Young Kim and Michelle Steel from the 39th and 48th districts respectively - two of three Korean-American Women to ever be elected into Congress. Kim, Steel, and Valadao were the first three Republican candidates to unseat a House Democrat in California since 1994.

▶ **SMALL CHANGES IN VOTER PREFERENCE LEAD TO HUGE SWINGS IN POLICY AND A LACK OF LONG-TERM PROBLEM SOLVING**

Since 1996, control of the House of Representatives has changed parties roughly every four years. Because continuous party control is never guaranteed, far-sighted legislation is rarely passed. If the other party gains control in the next election, they can (and often do) undo the achievements of the opposing party. A possible reason for this is that a strong majority of legislators represent safely partisan districts. These representatives are incentivized to act in their primary voters' interests alone and are therefore perhaps inclined against bipartisan cooperation. With partisanship remaining the greatest indicator of election outcomes, perhaps it is in our representatives' best electoral interest to act in the interest of their party. Such interests can include making sure legislative wins are wins for the party and losses for the opposing party.

As a result, parties often use their short-lived power for short-term gain, creating a challenging environment to advance longer-term policies.

▶ EVEN DISTRICTS DRAWN WITH GOOD INTENTIONS HAVE INESCAPABLE FLAWS

The dramatic rise in “safe seats” can be partially attributed to partisans seeking advantage during decennial redistricting, but not entirely. Single-winner districts are inherently susceptible to several flaws, regardless of the intentions of the district-drawers.

Only one perspective is represented. Regardless of the degree of diversity in a district, only one voice will be represented. Single-member districts prioritize the sole voice of the largest group rather than prioritizing an inclusive mix of voices.

Voters are “locked out” of representation. Over 70 million voters live in districts that are “safe seats” for the party they do not support. They do not get to vote for the dominant party’s nominee - the candidate that is all-but guaranteed to win the general election. These voters have no chance of being represented by someone who shares their views and will advance their interests.

“Fair districts” are not always possible. Sometimes it is impossible to award seats to a party roughly in proportion to that party’s vote share. For example, Republicans in Massachusetts earn none of the state’s nine seats but typically make up 30% - 40% of the vote share. Republican voters are not geographically concentrated enough to draw districts that could give them a majority in even a single district. According to a recent [report](#), “Though there are more ways of building a valid districting plan than there are particles in the galaxy, every single one of them would produce a 9–0 Democratic delegation.”

District-drawing is expensive and time-consuming. Redistricting is intended to balance the scales, but does not always achieve that goal. The process can be contentious and time-consuming, and sometimes last years due to legal action, but it’s only necessary because of our chosen election method.

Incentive to gerrymander. When 51% of voters can win 100% of the representation from a single district, parties are incentivized to try to control as many districts as possible. As long as we have single-winner districts, the practice of drawing districts to advantage one party is simply smart politics.

Districts become outdated when coalitions shift. Even a district map that is drawn with the intent of fair representation could become outdated quickly if voters move or if new coalitions arise as different issues become important to voters. Single-winner district maps that last for a decade simply cannot accommodate the many coalition groups that deserve a voice.

While single-winner districts have been the norm in House elections since 1842 and are currently required under a 1967 statute, their use in modern American politics leads directly to our broken system. Many of the problems described in this report cannot be undone as long as single-winner districts remain the standard. Congress has the power under the Constitution to establish a new norm.

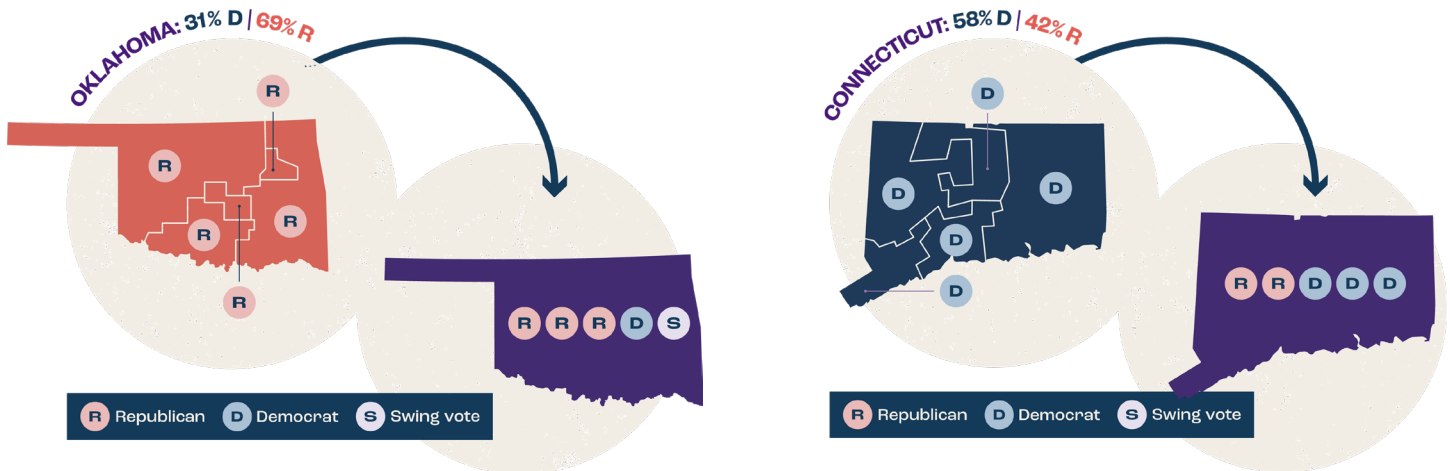
▶ THE FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

The Fair Representation Act is the bold and comprehensive solution we need to resolve the dysfunction in our current House elections: chronic lack of competition, voters' inability to hold elected officials accountable, lack of meaningful choices for most districts, and lack of diversity.

The Fair Representation Act establishes multi-winner districts for Congress, with members of Congress elected from each district using proportional ranked choice voting. Each state with more than one seat would adopt multi-winner districts of up to five seats.

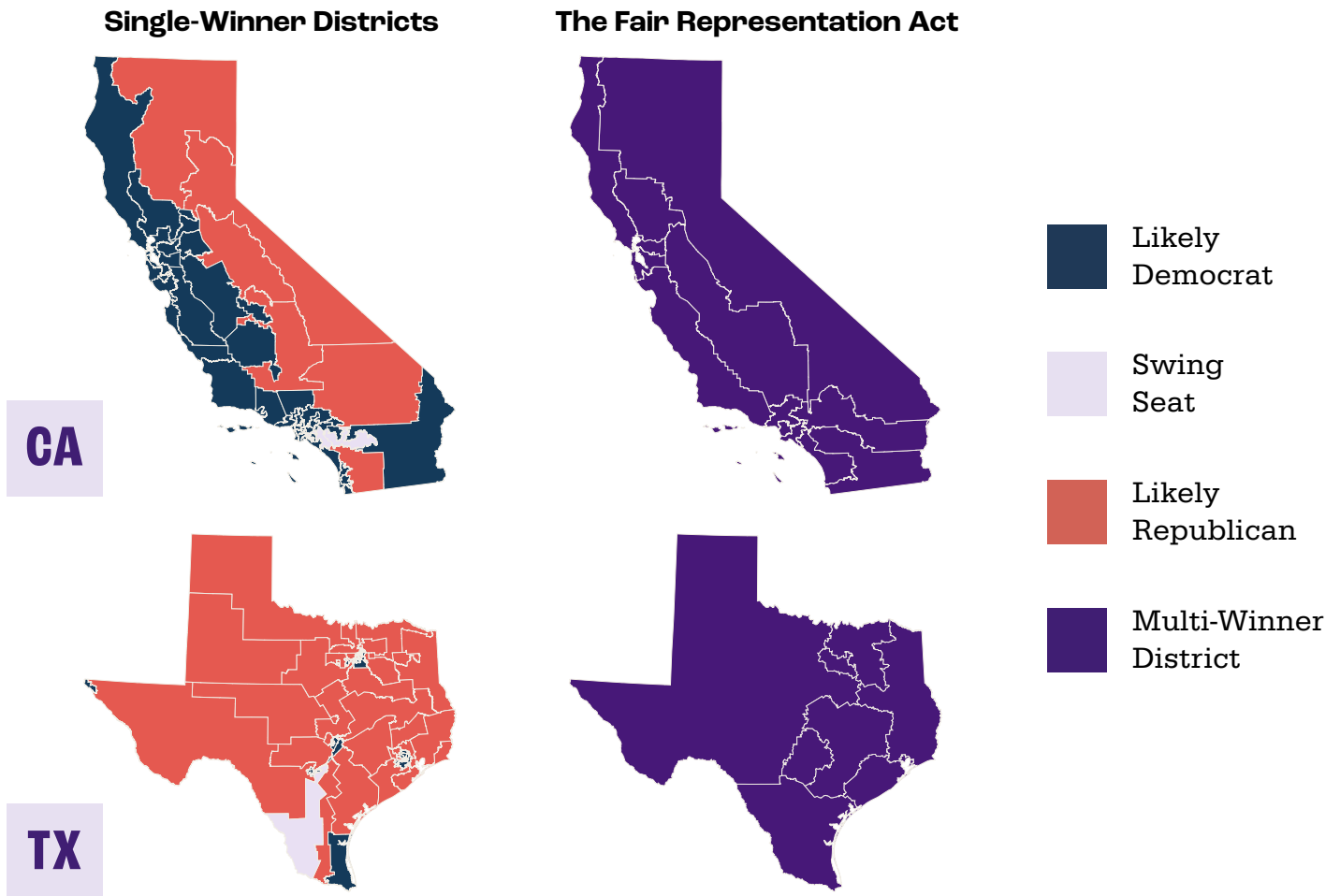
The twenty-three states with five representatives or fewer would elect all representatives from a single statewide district, eliminating the need to draw district lines. As shown below, the Fair Representation Act will transform states currently dominated by a single party.

FIGURE 8: CONNECTICUT AND OKLAHOMA GAIN BIPARTISAN REPRESENTATION



Medium-sized and large states would draw districts of three-to-five representatives each. Both Texas and California's congressional delegations would include more members of the minority party, to more closely reflect the will of the voters in those states.

FIGURE 9: FIGURE 9: FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT DISTRICTS IN LARGE STATES



With the Fair Representation Act, the flaws of winner-take-all elections would be nearly completely eliminated. FairVote’s analysis finds that:

- Nearly all voters in every election would participate in a meaningfully contested House election with a broad array of candidates on the ballot. Every multi-member district would be likely to elect at least one Democrat and at least one Republican.
- Each major party’s vote share would be more closely linked to the number of seats it controls in Congress, both within states and nationally. In a 50-50 year, we project 46% of seats would go to Democrats, 46% to Republicans, and 8% would be tossups.
- By largely eliminating states’ ability to gerrymander safely partisan districts, more districts would include competitive seats. This incentivizes candidates to compete for broad support and be more responsive to more voters.
- Representatives would be accountable to general election voters, not just primary voters. Winning a primary or nominating contest alone would no longer guarantee a candidate a seat because candidates will likely compete against other members of their own party in the general election.

- Representatives would be rewarded for collaborative governance and Congress would be more likely to function as intended by the architects of the Constitution.
- **Descriptive representation** would likely improve, with opportunities for voters of color to elect preferred candidates in more districts and for more women candidates to win seats. Black voters make up enough of the citizen voting age population to elect a candidate of choice in 26% of districts under the FRA compared to 5% of current single-winner districts, greatly increasing the portions of the map where Black voters get a meaningful say in the outcome. Latino voters would have the power to elect in 22% of districts compared to 6% of current single-member districts, and Asian American or Pacific Islanders in 6% of districts.
- Each district having its own delegation could facilitate the re-localization of politics. Representatives would be incentivized to cooperate with fellow delegates in order to get backup-choice votes from their supporters. An effective lane to do so might be on local issues.

This form of proportional representation is grounded in the American traditions of voting for candidates instead of parties (since voters are presented multiple options from each party in the general election), and of each state electing their own congressional delegation. It can be passed by statute – no constitutional amendment called for or required – and it would be consistent with a long history of electoral innovation.

Conclusion

Monopoly Politics 2022 demonstrates, once again, how little impact voters can have on Congress. Monopoly Politics does not need a complex algorithm to predict House elections because the very structure of our electoral system decides those outcomes by default. Between gerrymandered single-member districts, non-competitive elections, and rising partisan divisiveness, most voters simply cannot effect change through their vote for Congress. The need to govern across party lines is baked into the constitutional structures of the United States, but electoral incentives make doing so increasingly difficult.

This analysis reinforces the necessity of ambitious reform to modernize our outdated election method and restore the health of our democracy. The Fair Representation Act is the bold and comprehensive solution we need to meet this political moment.

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Elections data and analysis was supplied by the [Voting and Election Science Team](#), [The Upshot](#), [Redistricting Data Hub](#), and the U.S. Census Bureau.



APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

Our predictions are based on three simple components, which we calculate for each congressional district, making up our final equation.

$$\text{Projected Winning \%} = \text{District Partisanship} + \text{Incumbent Modifier} + \text{National Partisan Swing}$$

District Partisanship is the amount by which a district favors Democrats or Republicans. It is calculated by taking the difference between the vote margin in the district and the national vote margin from the most recent presidential election, based on the assumption that the presidential election is a better measure of statewide sentiment than any single congressional district. Presidential vote share in newly-drawn districts was calculated using precinct-level election results compiled by the Voting and Election Science Team.

$$\text{District Partisanship} = \frac{(\text{District vote margin Dem \%}) - (\text{National vote margin Dem \%})}{2} + 50\%$$

For example, in Alabama's first district, we compare the district's vote share for the Democrat in the 2020 presidential election (-28.58%) to the national Democratic margin (4.54%).

$$\text{District Partisanship}_{AL-01} = \frac{-28.58\% - 4.54\%}{2} + 50\% = 33.44\% \text{ Democratic vote share}$$

Therefore, a two-way race in Alabama's first district heavily favors the Republican to win. In our predictions, District Partisanship functions as a base to which other modifiers are added.

Incumbent Modifier accounts for the inherent electoral advantage enjoyed by incumbent candidates. The incumbent modifier includes a national incumbent bump and a measure called Performance Over Average Candidate (POAC). For 2020, we added a redistricting discount to penalize incumbents whose districts were drastically re-drawn.

$$\text{Incumbent Modifier} = (\text{National Incumbent Bump} + \text{POAC}) * \text{Redistricting Discount}$$

National Incumbent Bump is estimated at 1.3% for 2022 based on the overall declining trend illustrated in figure 4 above. This 1.3% is applied to every incumbent who is seeking re-election, and applies in districts where two incumbents are both competing, due to redistricting.

Performance Over Average Candidate (POAC) scores represent an estimate of each candidate's performance relative to what would be expected from a generic incumbent candidate of the same party. The POAC is calculated by comparing a winner's margin to the district partisanship.

$$\begin{aligned} 2020 \text{ POAC} &= \text{District Partisanship} - \text{Performance of Generic Incumbent} \\ &= \text{District Partisanship} - \text{Incumbent's vote share} - \text{National Incumbent Bump} \end{aligned}$$

For example, Representative Jerry Carl is running for reelection in Alabama's first district. The district partisanship in Carl's district is 33.4% Democratic, so a generic Republican is expected to earn 66.6% and a Republican incumbent 67.6%. In 2020, Carl earned 64.4% of the vote, underperforming by 3.2 points. Jerry Carl's 2020 POAC is -3.2%.

Our overall POAC for each incumbent is the weighted average of their POAC from their most recent three contested elections. We privilege more recent elections with higher weights, hypothesizing that those elections more accurately reflect the current opinions of the district's voters than those in the past. Finally, every POAC is discounted by multiplying by 0.85 to keep our estimates conservative in the face of redistricting. Districts where two incumbents are facing each other do not have any POAC applied, but they do get the National Incumbent Modifier.

Incumbent ran in 3 previous elections: $POAC = 0.85 * (0.6 * POAC_1 + 0.3 * POAC_2 + 0.3 * POAC_3)$

Incumbent ran in 2 previous elections: $POAC = 0.85 * (0.75 * POAC_1 + 0.25 * POAC_2)$

Incumbent ran in 1 previous election: $POAC = 0.85 * POAC_1$

Redistricting Discount is the amount by which we reduced the incumbent modifier to account for changes in district shape. The incumbent modifier intends to account for the characteristics that give an advantage to sitting Representatives, such as name recognition, relationships with local stakeholders in their district, an experienced campaign team, and an existing fundraising apparatus. Even incumbents running in almost entirely redrawn districts will retain some of those benefits, if not all.

Each incumbent modifier is reduced by multiplying the unaltered incumbent modifier by the percent of their new district that overlaps with their prior district. Incumbents with a greater district overlap have less of a reduction applied to their incumbent modifier. The maximum reduction applied to any incumbent is 50%, even for those incumbents whose districts are almost entirely redrawn, to reflect the advantages of incumbency that will persist even in the face of a new district.

For example, the maps below show a district where incumbent Tom Tiffany (R-WI) gets a full 100% incumbent modifier for running in a nearly-identical district, and a district where incumbent Suzan DelBene (D-WA) gets the minimum incumbent modifier of 50% for running in a district with less than 50% overlap with her prior district.

FIGURE 10: WISCONSIN-07, A NEARLY-UNCHANGED DISTRICT

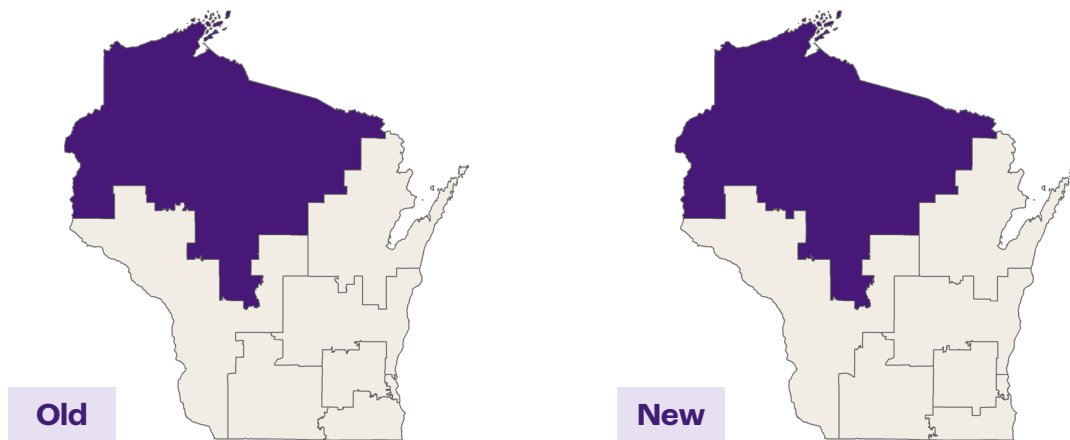


FIGURE 11: WASHINGTON-01, A TRANSFORMED DISTRICT



Finally, **National Partisan Swing** is a variable representing the average advantage of being either a Democrat or Republican in the upcoming year. Our default projection assumes a 50-50 partisan year so the default national partisan swing is 0. In our interactive web content, users can input values for national partisan swing ranging from +5 Republican to +5 Democrat.

Our **confidence levels** are determined by the projected margin of victory. Safe seats are those with a 12-percentage-point margin or greater. “Leaning” seats are those with a projected margin between 6 points and 12 points. Seats with a projected margin of 6 points or less are classified as “toss up”.