

METHODOLOGY

2014 Election Projections

The *Monopoly Politics 2014* projection model attempts to accurately predict the winning party and margin of victory in all 435 congressional districts using as few inputs as possible. Put most simply, the only information necessary for this model is the election results from each congressional district in 2008, 2010 and 2012.

The following raw data was used to create projected Democratic vote percentages for each congressional district: Barack Obama's performance in the district in 2012, Obama's nationwide vote margin, the incumbent candidate's vote percentages in the district in 2010 and 2012, Obama's performance in the incumbent's pre-redistricting district in 2008, the national partisan lean in 2010 and 2012 (calculated using district partisanship and incumbent victory margins), and the candidate's incumbency status in 2010 and 2012 (that is – incumbent, open seat candidate, or challenger).

Partisanship

The basis for the projection model is a district's partisanship. The district partisanship figure represents the underlying partisan lean of a district. Partisanship is calculated by taking Obama's two-party vote share in a district and subtracting half his national margin of victory. In 2012, for instance, Obama's national margin of victory was 3.93%, meaning that his national vote share was 51.96%. Thus, if Obama received 55% of the two-party vote in a district, that district's partisanship would be about 53%.

Incumbency Bump

In an open seat race, the model would predict a Democratic candidate to receive the same vote share as the district's Democratic partisanship. However, most incumbents receive a "bump" in vote share over that partisanship. In 2012, the average incumbent performed 4.5% better than their district partisanship; in 2010, that number was 4.8%. The basic projection model assumes that the average incumbency bump in 2014 will continue to be roughly 4.5%, though it also allows the simulation of outcomes given different levels of national pro- or anti-incumbent sentiment.

Candidate Influence

Not all incumbents or incumbent bumps are equal, however. Some incumbents perform significantly better than the presidential candidate of their party, and some perform worse. The model accounts for this by determining the "candidate influence" of each incumbent in the 2010 and 2012 elections, independent of district partisanship, national partisan tilt, and incumbency status.

The base candidate influence is the difference between the share of the two-party vote received by the candidate and the district's partisanship. A candidate in a 50% district who receives 55% of the vote has, by his or her influence, gained 5% of the vote.

Two other factors are significant enough that they must be considered in determining the influence of a candidate. One is whether a candidate was an incumbent, a challenger to an incumbent, or an open seat candidate in the election in question. Candidates who were incumbents in 2012 will continue to be incumbents in 2014 if they choose to run, and thus can be expected to have similar "candidate influence" in the next election. Candidates who ran in open seats in 2012, however, will be incumbents in 2014, meaning that they will likely receive an incumbency bump in 2014 that they did not in 2012. Because the average incumbency bump is assumed to be 4.5% in 2014, open seat winners are expected to do about 4.5% better than they did in 2012. For candidates who were challengers in 2012, the expected improvement is even greater. These candidates not only did not have their own incumbency bumps in the last election, but they also had to overcome their opponents' incumbency bumps. They are therefore expected to perform about 9% better in the next election than they did last time.

National Party Preference

The other relevant factor is the national partisan sentiment in the election in which the candidate was running. National party preference is calculated using the incumbency bump metric; the difference between the average incumbent bump of the two parties is equivalent to the national party preference margin. The party with the higher average incumbency bump was preferred by more voters in that year.

In 2012, Democratic incumbents beat their district partisanship on average by 4% more than did Republican incumbents. The national party preference in 2012, then, was about 52%-48% in favor of Democrats. Because of that advantage, Democratic incumbents in general can be expected to perform about 2% worse in 2014, assuming that neither party has an overall advantage in the election.

In 2010, the national party preference was about 54%-46% in favor of Republicans. As a result, the average Republican incumbent would have been expected to perform about 6% worse in 2012 than in 2010 and about 4% worse in a hypothetical even party election in 2014 than in 2010. In fact, Republicans did perform about six percentage points worse in 2012 than they did in 2010.

Past national party preference can be taken into account when projecting future candidate vote shares. A Democrat who received 55% of the vote in 2012, for instance, would be projected to win 53% of the vote in an even party election in 2014 (all else being equal). In that way, the national partisan tilt of a year is factored into candidate influence scores.

The complete formula for determining candidate influence in a given election is:

$$\text{Candidate Influence} = \text{Candidate Two-Party Vote Share} - \text{District Partisanship} + \text{Incumbency Status Adjustor} + \text{National Partisan Preference Adjustor}$$

Computing Projections

When computing projected vote shares in 2014, district partisanship is weighted more highly than candidate influence. That is because district partisanship is more consistent from year to year than individual candidate performance. Furthermore, candidate influence scores from 2012 are weighted more highly than those from 2010, as they better reflect voters' current views of their representatives and willingness to vote for them.

The formula for projecting the vote share of an incumbent in 2014 is:

$$\text{Projected Democratic \%} = \text{District Partisanship (D)} + 0.85(0.6 * 2012 \text{ Candidate Influence} + 0.4 * 2010 \text{ Candidate Influence})$$

Exceptions

There are several exceptions to the generic projection formula above. They are listed here.

- **First-Term Incumbents:** Because first-term incumbents tend to be the most vulnerable and have the least entrenched incumbency advantage, their candidate influence scores from the 2012 election are weighted considerably lower: just 0.15 instead of 0.85.
- **Special Elections:** It is impossible to determine the nationwide partisan preference at the time of a special election based on congressional election results, as there are no other congressional elections to provide context. Therefore, national partisan preference is ignored for special election results.
- **Incumbent vs. Incumbent Elections:** When two incumbents run against each other in a general election due to being drawn into the same district, the election is treated as an open seat race for the winning candidate because the two candidates' incumbency bumps cancel out. This principle is also applied to a handful of races where an incumbent was defeated in the 2010 election but won in the 2012 election in a very similar district to the district that they previously represented. In those cases, much of the defeated incumbent's incumbency advantage likely carried over to the next election cycle.

Customized Projections

The description of the projection model above assumes two things about the 2014 election: 1) voters nationwide will prefer the two parties equally, and 2) incumbents will have the same advantage over district partisanship that they did in 2012 (4.5%). These assumptions will not necessarily hold true, however. For that reason, the *Monopoly Politics 2014* spreadsheet allows users to simulate different 2014 election outcomes given different voter preferences for parties and incumbents overall.

For instance, if a user believes that 2014 will strongly favor Republicans (46% preference for Democrats) and strongly favor incumbents (8% average incumbency bump), the model will project the outcome in each district under those circumstances (a 15 seat gain for Republicans, in this instance).

The model accomplishes this by simply adding 1% to a Democratic candidate's projected vote share for each additional 1% in national party preference toward Democrats, and vice versa for Republicans. If users adjust the expected average incumbency bump, the model similarly adjusts the candidate influence scores of incumbents by the corresponding amount.

FairVote's 2014 Projected Winners

FairVote projects winners in as many districts as it considers to be safe for the incumbent party in *Monopoly Politics 2014*. Those projections are directly based on the model described above. If the incumbent party is projected to receive more than 56% of the vote in a district in 2014, then that district is projected. If the incumbent party is projected to receive less than 56% of the vote, the district is not projected.

There are two additional reasons why a district might not be projected, even if our model predicts that the incumbent party will receive more than 56% of the vote:

1. **The incumbent candidate won by a margin of less than 5% in 2012.** Such a low margin of victory is an indicator that the incumbent might still be vulnerable in 2014, even in a district that heavily favors their party.
2. **The incumbent represents a district that typically favors the opposite party.** American voters are increasingly unwilling to split their tickets between presidential and congressional candidates. Some incumbents have managed to survive in districts that favor the other party in presidential elections, but if the trend of hardening partisanship continues, these incumbents could be vulnerable even if they won by substantial margins in recent elections.

Using these criteria, FairVote projects outcomes in 373 of 435 races in 2014.

Projected Competition

In addition to projecting winners in 373 districts, FairVote also projects the degree of competitiveness in all 435 districts. These competitiveness projections employ the same prediction format used by most well-known congressional forecasters such as the Cook Political Report: separating races into "Safe R/D," "Likely R/D," "Lean R/D," and "Toss Up."

These competitiveness ratings are entirely based on vote share projections produced by our model, with no exceptions. The categories correspond to projected vote shares as follows:

Projected D %	Competition Rating
<42%	Safe R
42%-44%	Likely R
44%-47%	Lean R
47%-53%	Toss Up
53%-56%	Lean D
56%-58%	Likely D
>58%	Safe D

Performance Over Average Candidate (POAC)

Monopoly Politics 2014 also includes a metric to measure the candidate strength of incumbents independent of other factors such as district partisanship. The metric, “Performance Over Average Candidate,” is designed to show the added value that a candidate provides to his or her party over an average candidate in the same district, election, and incumbency situation.

POAC scores are akin to the “candidate influence” scores described above. The difference is that candidate influence is forward-looking (that is, it predicts the influence that a candidate will have on the outcome of an election in 2014) while POAC scores are backward-looking (that is, they evaluate the influence that a candidate had on races in 2012 and 2010 compared to an average candidate in the same situation).

In practice, this means that POAC scores are 4.5% lower than candidate influence scores. That is because the average incumbent outperformed district partisanship by 4.5% in 2012. Incumbents are projected to have that same 4.5% “influence” in 2014, but an average incumbent with a 4.5% candidate influence in 2012 would have a POAC score of 0%.

To illustrate how POAC is calculated, below are a few hypothetical examples of the different POAC scores that can result when a Democrat receives 55% of the vote in a district.

- A Democratic candidate who won 55% of the vote in a party-neutral year, in an open seat election, in a district with a 50% Democratic partisanship, would have a POAC score of 5%. That is, the candidate did 5% better than what an average Democrat would be expected to receive in that election.
- That same 55% result in an open seat race in a 55% Democratic district would earn a POAC score of 0%. That is, the candidate performed exactly as well as an average open seat Democrat would be expected to.
- That same 55% result in a 50% Democratic district in a year when Democrats had a national preference of 52% to 48%, as in 2012, would result in a POAC score of 3%. That is, an average

Democrat in this open seat race would have won the race with 52% of the vote, 3% less than this hypothetical candidate received.

- That same 55% result by a Democratic incumbent in 2012 in a 50% district would earn a negative POAC score of -1.5%. In 2012, the average Democratic incumbent outperformed district partisanship by 6.5%, yet this incumbent only outperformed district partisanship by 5.0%.

In the *Monopoly Politics 2014* state one pagers, the listed POAC scores are averages of the 2012 and 2010 POAC scores for each incumbent, assuming they ran as incumbents in each election. If incumbents only ran in 2012, their POAC scores for that election are listed. First-term incumbents are not considered for the “Strongest Candidate” category in the state-specific analysis of this report, however.

Fair Representation Voting Projections

Monopoly Politics 2014 and the Fair Voting Solution also projects partisan outcomes in a theoretical election conducted under the fair representation voting plan outlined in the report. These projections are more general than the 2014 projections made for the existing district system. Only partisanship – that is, presidential election data – is used to make projections in “super districts.” Current incumbents and their incumbency advantages are not taken into account.

Seats are projected for one of the two major parties in a super district when the partisanship of that super district exceeds certain thresholds, dependent on its population. In a three-seat super district, the threshold of election is 25%. If the partisanship of such a district were 30% Democratic, Democrats would be projected to win one of three seats; if the partisanship were 60% Democratic, they would be projected to win two of three; if the partisanship were 80% Democratic, they would be projected to win all three. In a five-seat district, the threshold of election is 16.7%, and the same projection system applies: if the partisanship of the district were 20% Democratic, Democrats would be projected to win one of five seats, and so on.

When the partisanship of a district is close to a threshold of election (within 3%) or a multiple thereof, the seat is not projected for either party. For instance, a three-seat super district with a 27% Democratic partisanship would be considered to be a swing district, as 27% is within 3% of 25%. The 3% margin was chosen because under the current election system, almost all of the congressional seats that could realistically be won by either party are within 3% of an even 50% partisanship.

While it is difficult to predict whether that margin of inter-party competitiveness would continue to hold true under the more fluid party system that would likely result from fair representation voting, this projection system provides a plausible two-party breakdown of the House of Representatives under our fair voting plan.