# MONOPOLY POLITICS AND THE 2014 HORSERACE:
## THE FIGHT FOR A HOUSE MAJORITY, VULNERABLE INCUMBENTS, AND OPEN SEATS

**Spotlighted Facts:**

- **100% accuracy in 333 projections in 2012:** In July 2012, FairVote used its methodology for predicting congressional elections to project 333 House winners. The projections were based entirely on recent election results in the districts. Every projection was accurate despite not factoring in any other information from the 2012 election season, including polls, campaign spending, challenger quality, or incumbent voting record.

- **373 projections in 2014 and the overwhelming Republican advantage**: Our model projects 373 winners in the 2014 election. Of these 373 projections, 210 districts are safe for Republicans and 163 for Democrats. Republicans need to win only eight of the 62 non-projected seats to hold their majority. The model projects that Republicans are likely to maintain control of the House unless Democrats win more than 55% of the two-party national vote.

- **Few contested open seats so far:** Of the 21 House seats that are currently vacant or will be open in 2014, Republicans won 15 in 2012. Only two of these seats are vulnerable. Of the six Democratic-held open seats, only one is potentially vulnerable.

- **Eight of the 10 most vulnerable incumbents are Democrats:** Of the 10 incumbents most likely to be defeated in 2014, eight are Democrats. Of the 24 incumbents with projected margins of victory of less than 6%, 20 are Democrats.

- **Expect high rates of incumbent retention:** The incumbent re-election rate is likely to return to the era of 1998 to 2004, when rates were consistently around 98%, in contrast to the relatively high number of incumbent defeats in the last four elections.

- **Nine of 10 worst-performing incumbents are Republicans**: Of the 10 incumbents who performed worst in our "Performance Over Average Candidate" metric, nine are Republicans.

- **Projection spreadsheet allows users to simulate "wave" years and measure the overall security of the Republican majority:** By changing in a single spreadsheet cell, users can simulate the outcome of the 2014 election given any national two-party split. This feature underscores just how shielded most incumbents are from competition no matter how badly their party does. It also highlights the severe national partisan skew. When the national partisan preference is 54% for Republicans, Republicans would have a 262-173 edge over Democrats. In an exact mirror year in favor of Democrats, Republicans would still have a 228-207 edge in seats.

**Lessons from the Power of our Projection Model**

The centerpiece of *Monopoly Politics 2014 and the Fair Voting Solution* is FairVote's projection model for the 2014 congressional elections. As of November 8, 2013, the report projects outcomes in 373 of 435 U.S. House elections in 2014. Of those 373 races, FairVote projects 210 to be won by Republicans and 163 to be won by Democrats. The only factor likely to change the outcomes of those projections is current incumbents deciding not to run in 2014.

FairVote's projections are based solely on recent presidential and congressional election results from each district. While campaign spending (either by candidates or outside sources) and the representatives' voting records could affect margins of victory in a few cases, they are not necessary to project the outcomes in the vast majority of races. Projections could change with a "wave" year toward one party, but even in such a year we would expect nearly all these seats to be won by the current party, given the cautious nature of our model.

Using this approach for the 2012 elections, FairVote in July 2012 projected 333 House race winners. Every single projection proved to be correct despite a small national tilt toward Democrats. The accuracy of these projections sheds light on the fact that the outcomes of most congressional races are effectively predetermined long before the election takes place. The large number of safe seats is the result of, above all, the use of winner-take-all voting rules in districts where one party has a consistent and fundamental advantage among voters.

For the 2014 election, FairVote projects winners in even more races than in 2012. We first released these projections in April 2013. This report, with updated projections and more detailed analysis, comes a full year in advance of the election. Our projections for the 2016 election will be finalized as soon as we input the results of the 2014 House elections, as no other data will affect the 2016 projections.

For this cycle, we used presidential election data for each congressional district, compiled by *Daily Kos*, to determine partisanship ratings for those districts. Partisanship measures how a district voted for Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential election relative to the candidates' nationwide vote percentages. We pioneered this method in our first *Monopoly Politics* report in July 1997; Charlie Cook profiled our study in a *Roll Call* column and later adapted it to create his Partisan Voting Index.

Using only those partisanship ratings and incumbents' margins of victory in 2012 and 2010, our simple model projects the vote percentage that each incumbent (or the incumbent party in an open seat) will win in a two-party race in 2014.

We are projecting outcomes in 373 races, but the incumbent party has a clear advantage in most of the remaining 62 races. The model provides useful information on what to expect in all 435 districts in the upcoming midterm election. We do not project all races because there is a small degree to which candidate-specific factors will influence outcomes in the ever-shrinking band of competitive districts.

**2014 Projections: Partisan Control of House and Competitiveness**

Underscoring the remarkable degree of partisan bias in our congressional election system, FairVote projects 48 more Republican winners than Democratic winners in the 373 districts seen as safe for one party in a non-wave election. This underlying bias toward Republicans is based primarily in the substantial majority of congressional districts with partisanships that favor Republicans and will hold generally true even in a Democratic wave year like in 2008, in which the national party preference was about 54% to 46% for Democrats. In fact in a simulated Democratic wave year with 54% support, our model projects Republicans to win 228 districts compared to 207 for Democrats. In an exact mirror year for Republicans, Republicans would be projected to have the advantage in 262 districts and Democrats just 173.

Given these 373 safe seat projections, Democrats would need to win 54 of the remaining 62 districts in order to retake the House. We project that a Democratic victory in 2014 would require a nationwide preference for Democrats of more than 56% to 44%. That translates roughly into a raw total of some 55% of the vote, factoring in the advantage that Republicans hold due to having more current incumbents and any potential uncontested races. If Democrats have a majority preference of less than that 56% in 2014, it likely would mean a second consecutive election in which one party receives more total congressional votes but the other party wins more House seats.

The winner-take-all American congressional map is biased heavily toward incumbents, very few of whom have any real chance of losing a general election. FairVote projects that a supermajority of incumbents (354) will enjoy "safe" races – that is, races in which they are expected to win by at least 16 percentage points. That margin is far beyond what would put incumbents at risk even in a year in which their party does very poorly overall. As a result, most Americans will not have a realistic chance to elect a congressional representative of a different party in 2014. In fact, only 24 races (less than 5%) are projected to be true toss-ups – that is, races in which the incumbent is expected to receive between 47% and 53% of the two-party vote.

A table totaling all congressional races by likely winning party and competitiveness in an even partisan year is below (note again that FairVote is not making definitive projections for all these races):

**Competitiveness Projections: "Typical" Year with Voters Divided 50-50**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Safe Republican: | 202 | Safe Democratic: | 152 |
| Likely Republican: | 16 | Likely Democratic: | 13 |
| Lean Republican: | 12 | Lean Democratic: | 16 |
| Toss Up (Slight R): | 6 | Toss Up (Slight D): | 18 |
| Total R: | 236 | Total D: | 199 |

*Monopoly Politics 2014* also gives users a tool to simulate the outcome of the 2014 election given different levels of nationwide support for the two major parties, as well as different levels of support for congressional incumbents overall.

The chart below shows the number of seats that the two major parties are likely to win if the 2014 election favors Democrats 54% to 46% (as in 2008), if it is an even partisan year, and if it is a year that favors Republicans 54% to 46% (as in 2010). Note the difference in effect between a 4% shift toward each of the two parties.

**Competitiveness Projections: Simulating Wave Years**

| National Partisan Tilt | Seats Projected to Favor Republicans | Seats Projected to Favor Democrats |
|---|---|---|
| 54% - 46% Democratic (Democratic Year) | **228**  (134 safe) | **207**  (170 safe) |
| 50% - 50% Balance (No Partisan Edge) | **236**  (201 safe) | **199**  (151 safe) |
| 54% - 46% Republican (Republican Year) | **262**  (225 safe) | **173**  (124 safe) |

**Determining National Preference: Relative Performance by Incumbents and Open Seat Winners**

FairVote does not assess national voter preference in House races by totaling votes, as there are too many district-by-district factors to make that a reliable gauge of underlying voter preference. Instead, we use the following two analytic tools:

*Open Seat Percentages versus District Partisanship*: FairVote determines the partisanship of districts and assesses the average relative performance of Democratic and Republican candidates compared to that partisanship in open seats, where neither party has the advantage of running an incumbent. In 2012, for example, we determined that Democrats candidates in open seat races on average ran 1.9% ahead of district partisanship. That means victorious Democrats in these races won by a margin of 3.8% more than they would have in a nationally even election.

*The "Incumbency Bump":* FairVote calculates the average margin by which Democratic and Republican incumbents outperformed their district partisanship in their vote percentages. In strong incumbent years, the average incumbency bump for both parties can be quite large. In 2000, it was nearly 8%, meaning that an average incumbent had a victory percentage of 8% higher than what a non-incumbent nominee of that party would have earned, translating into a 16% victory margin boost. In recent elections, the incumbency bump has declined, as voters have become somewhat less inclined to favor incumbents and more inclined to stick with their underlying partisan preference.

When one party's incumbents on average receive a greater "incumbency bump" than the other party's incumbents, there is an overall preference for that party in the election. In 2012, Democratic

incumbents ran 6.5% ahead of district partisanship on average, as opposed to 2.5% for Republican incumbents – a 4% edge for Democrats, for an overall advantage of 52% to 48%.

In the table below are the raw popular vote margins, national preference calculated using open seat races, and national preference calculated using incumbency bumps in the last three elections. Note that we typically use the incumbency bump-based margin to describe the partisan tilt of a year because there is a larger sample size of incumbents than open seats. The open seat measure serves to confirm the validity of the incumbency bump-based party split.

**Different Measures of National Partisan Advantage, 2008-2012**

| Election Year | Party Split (Actual House Seats Won) | Party Split (Based on Raw Popular Vote) | Party Split (Based on Open Seats) | Party Split (Based on Incumbency Bump) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2008** | 59.1%-40.9% Democratic Edge | 55.5%-44.5% Democratic Edge | 53.3%-46.7% Democratic Edge | 54.0%-46.0% Democratic Edge |
| **2010** | 55.6%-44.4% Republican Edge | 53.4%-46.6% Republican Edge | 52.4%-47.6% Republican Edge | 53.8%-46.2% Republican Edge |
| **2012** | 53.8%-46.2% Republican Edge | 50.5%-49.5% Democratic Edge | 51.9%-48.1% Democratic Edge | 52.0%-48.0% Democratic Edge |

**Performance Over Average Candidate (POAC): A Metric for Measuring Candidate Strength**

*Monopoly Politics 2014 and the Fair Voting Solution* introduces a new metric for measuring the strength of incumbents: Performance Over Average Candidate, or "POAC." An incumbent's POAC score measures a candidate's vote share in 2012 and 2010 relative to what a generic candidate of the same district, incumbency status, and party would likely have received.

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%.

POAC scores can be an informative indicator of a candidate's ability to transcend party lines and induce voters to split their tickets. Candidates with high POAC scores tend to be from competitive districts and often represent a district with a partisanship favoring the other party. Their strong POAC score explains why they were able to win in such a district. Candidates with low POAC scores tend to be more extreme candidates in safer districts. Though these candidates perform worse than a generic party candidate would in their districts in general elections, their low POAC scores might in fact make them less vulnerable to a primary challenge, as a higher score would indicate support from the other major party's voters. Candidates that have been associated with a scandal also tend to have low POAC scores.

The POAC scores listed below are an average of candidates' scores from the 2012 and 2010 elections, to control in part for the strength of their opponents. First-term Members are not listed.

### *Ten Strongest Incumbents: Performance Over Average Candidate Rating*

| District | Incumbent | Party | POAC |
|----------|-----------|-------|------|
| WV-3 | Rahall, Nick | Democratic | 15.7% |
| UT-4 | Matheson, Jim | Democratic | 14.2% |
| MA-8 | Lynch, Stephen | Democratic | 14.0% |
| MN-7 | Peterson, Collin | Democratic | 13.8% |
| MI-10 | Miller, Candice | Republican | 10.4% |
| IL-3 | Lipinski, Dan | Democratic | 9.9% |
| NJ-2 | LoBiondo, Frank | Republican | 9.5% |
| FL-27 | Ros-Lehtinen, Ileana | Republican | 9.4% |
| IL-18 | Schock, Aaron | Republican | 9.0% |
| MI-4 | Camp, David | Republican | 7.2% |

*Ten Weakest Incumbents: Performance Over Average Candidate Rating*

| District | Incumbent | Party | POAC |
|---|---|---|---|
| TN-4 | DesJarlais, Scott | Republican | -11.5% |
| MS-4 | Palazzo, Steven | Republican | -11.0% |
| AK-1 | Crawford, Rick | Republican | -10.7% |
| RI-1 | Cicilline, David | Democratic | -10.3% |
| WV-1 | McKinley, David | Republican | -9.9% |
| AL-2 | Roby, Martha | Republican | -9.7% |
| VA-9 | Griffith, Morgan | Republican | -8.5% |
| OK-2 | Mullin, Markwayne | Republican | -7.8% |
| MO-4 | Hartzler, Vicki | Republican | -7.7% |
| AL-5 | Brooks, Mo | Republican | -7.4% |

**The Ten Most Vulnerable Incumbents in 2014**

Listed below are the ten incumbents that our projection model lists as the most vulnerable in 2014. A negative projected margin of victory means that the model expects the incumbent to lose.

| District | Incumbent | Party | Projected Margin of Victory |
|---|---|---|---|
| UT-4 | Matheson, Jim | Democratic | -9.0% |
| CA-31 | Miller, Gary | Republican | -5.0% |
| FL-18 | Murphy, Patrick | Democratic | -4.6% |
| NC-7 | McIntyre, Mike | Democratic | -4.0% |
| TX-23 | Gallego, Pete | Democratic | -2.6% |
| WV-3 | Rahall, Nick | Democratic | -1.8% |
| CA-21 | Valadao, David | Republican | -1.8% |
| IL-12 | Enyart, William | Democratic | +0.2% |
| GA-12 | Barrow, John | Democratic | +0.6% |
| AZ-9 | Sinema, Kyrsten | Democratic | +2.0% |

Two facts stand out from this list. Firstly, only seven of the ten most vulnerable incumbents are actually expected to lose in a nationally even year according to our model (we never officially project an incumbent defeat). Though several other incumbents have low enough projected margins of victory that random variance will likely lead to some of them to losing as well, a high incumbency re-election rate in 2014 is a near-certainty (again, assuming there is no major wave for either party). We anticipate a return to the above-98% incumbency re-election rates of 1998-2004, as opposed to the slightly lower rates of 2006-2010 (which still averaged above 90% incumbency retention).

Secondly, there is a heavy imbalance between the parties in this list, as only two of the ten most vulnerable incumbents are Republicans. The imbalance continues if you move further down the list: of the 24 incumbents with projected margins of victory of less than 6%, 20 are Democrats. This disparity can be explained in part by the fact that there are currently more Democratic incumbents representing

Republican-leaning districts. There are also more freshmen Democrats, as Democrats picked up seats in 2012, and freshmen tend to be the most vulnerable incumbents.

The high percentage of vulnerable Democrats makes the 2014 congressional election an especially difficult prospect for the Democratic Party. A Democratic wave year would take most of these districts out of play for Republicans, but in a nationally even year Republicans would be more likely to pick up seats than Democrats.

**The Horserace in Open Seats in 2014**

As of November 9, 2013, there are 22 districts where the incumbent has either announced that they will not be running for re-election in 2014 or is already no longer in office, and an open seat special election will be held before Election Day 2014. Sixteen of these seats were won by Republicans in 2012.

| District | Incumbent | Current Party | District Partisanship | 2014 Projected Winner | 2014 Projected Competition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AL-1 | VACANT [Bonner, Jo] | R | 35.9% | R | Safe R |
| AL-6 | Bachus, Spencer | R | 23.3% | R | Safe R |
| AK-2 | Griffin, Tim | R | 42.2% | R | Likely R |
| AK-4 | Cotton, Tom | R | 35.1% | R | Safe R |
| CA-45 | Campbell, John | R | 42.2% | R | Likely R |
| FL-13 | VACANT [Young, Bill] | R | 48.8% | No projection | Toss Up |
| GA-1 | Kingston, Jack | R | 41.6% | R | Safe R |
| GA-10 | Broun, Paul | R | 35.0% | R | Safe R |
| GA-11 | Gingrey, Phil | R | 30.4% | R | Safe R |
| HI-1 | Hanabusa, Colleen | D | 68.4% | D | Safe D |
| IA-1 | Braley, Bruce | D | 54.9% | No projection | Lean D |
| LA-5 | VACANT [Alexander, Rodney] | R | 36.4% | R | Safe R |
| LA-6 | Cassidy, Bill | R | 31.0% | R | Safe R |
| ME-2 | Michaud, Mike | D | 52.6% | No projection | Toss Up |
| MA-5 | VACANT [Markey, Ed] | D | 64.1% | D | Safe D |
| MI-14 | Peters, Gary | D | 79.3% | D | Safe D |
| MN-6 | Bachmann, Michelle | R | 40.6% | R | Safe R |
| MT-At Large | Daines, Steve | R | 41.2% | R | Safe R |
| NC-6 | Coble, Howard | R | 39.9% | R | Safe R |
| NJ-3 | Runyan, Jon | R | 50.4% | No projection | Toss Up |
| PA-13 | Schwartz, Allyson | D | 64.7% | D | Safe D |
| WV-2 | Capito, Shelley Moore | R | 37.1% | R | Safe R |

Although incumbency advantage will not be a factor in any of these races, we are projecting 18 seats to be won by the majority party, meaning that their district partisanships are greater than 56% for that party. Of the remaining four seats, only two (Florida-13 and New Jersey-3) are true toss-ups. The Florida-13 seat left vacant by the death of longtime incumbent Bill Young could be an early bellwether for the overall partisan tilt of the 2014 general election, as its special election in January 2014

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For the full list of 435 projections, partisanship ratings, and POAC scores, see the *Monopoly Politics 2014* spreadsheet – embedded online and also available for download. The spreadsheet allows users to manually change the overall partisan lean of the 2014 election, as well as the average advantage that incumbents will receive over challengers (the "incumbency bump"), reflecting the overall attitude of voters toward incumbents.