

PI SIGMA ALPHA

UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF POLITICS

ΠΣΑ



ELON UNIVERSITY | FALL 2023 | VOL. XXIII NO. 2

The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics (ISSN 1556-2034) is published biannually by the Sigma Upsilon Chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha, Elon University, Department of Political Science, 100 Campus Drive, Gray Pavilion, 2333 Campus Box, Elon, NC 27244. The Journal is funded by Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society, 1527 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036, <http://www.pisigmaalpha.org/>

The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics was founded in the Spring of 2001 by the Delta Omega Chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha at Purdue University, under the name *The American Undergraduate Journal of Politics and Government*. With the sponsorship of Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society, the name of the publication was changed to *The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics* as of the Fall 2004 edition.

Electronic editions of the *Journal* are available online at <http://www.psajournal.org>. For further information, please contact Dr. Baris Kesgin at Elon University (bkesgin@elon.edu).

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the editors and faculty advisors of *The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics*.

The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics and its content are copyrighted by Pi Sigma Alpha. While holding these rights, Pi Sigma Alpha exerts editorial or other control over neither the content of the *Journal* nor the decisions and actions of its staff in the course of normal business operations. As such, Pi Sigma Alpha neither asserts nor accepts responsibility for the content and actions of staff of the publication in the normal course of business as the customs and usages of the law allow.

All assertions of fact and statements of opinion are solely those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society, the Editorial Board, the Advisory Board, the Faculty Advisors, Elon University, or its faculty and administration.

COPYRIGHT © 2023 PI SIGMA ALPHA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics

Fall 2023

Volume XXIII

Number 2

Forty-Seventh Edition

Emma Bach

Senior Content Editor

Nina Dascoli

Senior Content Editor

Grant Baker

Junior Content Editor

Jade May

Junior Content Editor

Dr. Baris Kesgin

Co-Advisor and Co-Editor

Dr. Aaron Sparks

Co-Advisor and Co-Editor

Editorial Board

Chloe Berkowitz–Pereyra

Tori Kelleher

Eli Bier

Katey Polovin

Hanna Engelhardt

Nolan Schreiner

Curran Gilster

Hunter Siegel

Lana Jacobs

Lorenzo Tibolla

Faculty Advisory Board

Dr. Victor Asal

Dr. Andrea Lopez

Dr. Damion Blake

Dr. Sibel Oktay

Dr. Adriana Boersner

Dr. Raul Pachego-Vega

Dr. Dillan Bono-Lunn

Dr. Christine Pappas

Dr. Jessica Carew

Dr. Robert Pepperman Taylor

Dr. Youssef Chouhoud

Dr. Elisha Savchak-Trogon

Dr. May Darwich

Dr. Joel Shelton

Dr. Josephine Jarpa Dawuni

Dr. Brent Steele

Dr. Ransford Edwards

Dr. Heather Sullivan

Dr. Emily Farris

Dr. Cameron Thies

Dr. Ken Fernandez

Dr. Matthew Young

Dr. Cymone Fourshey

Dr. Kelebogile Zvobgo

Dr. Hakeem Jefferson

Editor's Preface to the Fall Edition

Here at Elon University, we are extremely grateful to host *The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics* for the seventh semester. This Fall Elon University was given the opportunity to host the *Journal* for a second term. We are proud to present the Fall 2023 issue and congratulate all authors published in this issue for their high achievement.

This publication seeks to highlight the intellectual curiosity that leads to innovative scholarship in all subfields of political science, scholarship that addresses timely questions, is carefully crafted, and utilizes diverse methodologies. We are committed to intellectual integrity, a fair and objective review process, and a high standard of scholarship as we showcase the work of undergraduate scholars, most of whom pursue questions that have been traditionally ignored in scholarship but that drive our discipline forward.

Following the lead of the American Political Science Review (APSR) Editorial Board, we are excited to publish research in the areas of “American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law and policy, racial and ethnic politics, the politics of gender and sexuality and qualitative and quantitative research methods.” This publication also values the relationships formed through student–faculty collaboration and aims to build a culture of scholarship that expands beyond the college campus. We hope to encourage and empower students to seek out knowledge and pursue their potential, contributing to scholarship in a variety of disciplines.

This year, we thank our advisors Dr. Baris Kesgin and Dr. Aaron Sparks for their support, without which the issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the entirety of the Political Science and Policy Studies Department at Elon University; our Faculty Advisory Board; and all the students who shared their exceptional work with us this semester. Finally, we would like to thank our editorial board for the countless hours they have spent reading, dissecting and discussing all the submissions to the *Journal*.

We are excited to present the Fall 2023 edition of the *Journal*. Thank you for your continued support and readership of our publication; we hope you enjoy the Fall 2023 edition.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board at Elon University

Submission of Manuscripts

The *Journal* accepts manuscripts from undergraduates of any class and major. Members of Pi Sigma Alpha are especially encouraged to submit their work. We strive to publish papers of the highest quality in all areas of political science.

Generally, selected manuscripts have been well-written works with a fully developed thesis and strong argumentation stemming from original analysis. Authors may be asked to revise their work before being accepted for publication.

Submission deadlines are September 15th for the Fall edition and February 15th for the Spring edition. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis; therefore, early submissions are strongly encouraged.

Students may submit their work through Elon University's submission portal, found here: <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/arts-and-sciences/political-science/psa-journal/>. Alternatively, students may email psajournal@elon.com with an attached Word document of the manuscript. In the body of the email, students are asked to include their name and university, the title of the manuscript, and the closest subfield of political science to which their manuscript pertains (American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, or policy studies). Due to the time committed to the manuscript review process, we ask students to submit only one manuscript per submission cycle.

Submitted manuscripts must include a short abstract (approximately 150 words) and citations/references that follow the *APSA Style Manual for Political Science*. Please do not exceed the maximum page length of 35 double-spaced pages, which includes references, tables, figures, and appendices.

The *Journal* is a student-run enterprise with editors and an Editorial Board that are undergraduate students and Pi Sigma Alpha members at Elon University. The Editorial Board relies heavily on the help of our Faculty Advisory Board, which consists of political science faculty from across the nation, including members of the Pi Sigma Alpha Executive Council.

Please direct any questions about submissions or the *Journal's* upcoming editions to the editors at Elon University: psajournal@elon.com.

Contents

Ideological Extremity of Campaign Rhetoric: Analyzing Uncompetitive Candidates in the 2022
Midterms..... 7
Gretchen Ellis, St. Olaf College

Ideological Extremity of Campaign Rhetoric: Analyzing Uncompetitive Candidates in the 2022 Midterms

Gretchen Ellis, St. Olaf College

Political campaigning does influence a voter, and studies show that what a candidate says during the campaign holds meaning. Although there has been research on the effects of the language of political campaigns, little research raises the critical question of how those candidates will position themselves ideologically concerning their rhetoric throughout a campaign to win over the electorate. Specifically, when that electorate is ideologically incongruent to their ideology. I address this question by analyzing the previous literature on uncompetitive candidates and analyzing a novel dataset of text files from campaign pages for those running for the United States House of Representatives in 2022. I discovered that not all uncompetitive candidates adopt campaign rhetoric more ideologically similar to their electorate. Republican candidates in Democratic districts chose to continue to use more conservative campaign rhetoric, while Democrats chose to use more median rhetoric, choosing to appeal towards the electorate more.

INTRODUCTION

Can political campaigns actually influence a voter or are voters already set in their ways? Political science research has been split on the answer to this question, but research does show us that political campaigns matter to the American electorate in one way or another (Jacobson 2015). Further, studies of democratic theory have informed us that what these candidates say also has meaning, alluding to the impact on the American electorate (Mansbridge 2003). Beyond general theory on the effects of political campaigning, it is less clear how those candidates will position themselves ideologically concerning their rhetoric throughout a campaign to win over the electorate. Specifically, how do candidates that do not share the same ideology as their electorate position themselves ideologically regarding their campaign rhetoric?

Previous works point to various competing theories of independent variables that may impact the ideological extremity of campaign rhetoric, the most common being the median voter theorem, where politicians will choose to remain more toward the center ideologically in order to appeal towards a wider set of possible voters (Downs 1957). A competing variable however is the idea of asymmetric polarization and the theory that Republicans will always remain ideologically loyal whilst Democrats are more open to compromise on their ideological positions (Grossmann and Hopkins 2015). Extending on the notion of asymmetric polarization, the widening of the gap between the Democratic and Republican party has created more polarization, however this polarization is largely asymmetrical due to the Republican party's thirty five

year shift to the right and embrace of far-right ideologies such as the 'Tea Party' (Hacker and Pierson 2015). The ideological extremity of primaries and the difference between a challenger and an incumbent also can impact this extremity. Paradoxically, the impact of these independent variables has not been studied when the candidate is mismatched ideologically to their electorate. Furthermore, there is extensive literature on whether the electorate punishes extremist candidates, which may impact how extreme a candidate decides to be (Caughey and Warshaw 2019). However, this literature only focuses on roll call voting instead of campaign rhetoric. Lastly, the literature surrounding uncompetitive candidates is limited and focuses on senate elections, presenting an opportunity for more study and research in this area.

After an introduction to what campaign rhetoric is, exploring the literature surrounding the independent variables that influence campaign rhetoric, and a review of the previous research on uncompetitive candidates, a several key hypotheses emerge. The first supports the median voter theorem, suggesting that these uncompetitive candidates will align their campaign rhetoric with the views of the median voter. On the other hand, the second opposes this by supporting the theories from asymmetric polarization, noting that these uncompetitive candidates will use partisan campaign rhetoric. Using campaign website data and a program entitled *Wordscores* I can analyze the partisan extremity of campaign rhetoric of uncompetitive candidates and test my hypotheses. My analysis will further shed light on the importance of partisanship and polarization on the future of the analysis campaign rhetoric.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Campaign Rhetoric

The scholarship on campaign rhetoric, or using words or phrases to convince voters, essentially surrounds issue ownership and framing candidates use around those issues. In general, one of the goals of campaign rhetoric is to expose voters to the candidate, primarily done through issue priming (Druckman 2004). Focusing on priming issues allows candidates to focus elections on the issues and not on the candidates themselves. Further, this previous research is not just theoretical, with research pointing to the positive effects on voter turnout due to priming in campaign rhetoric (Druckman 2004). Along with priming issues, candidates choose to focus on issue ownership, where voters view a party as having advantages on the handling of specific issues, and framing throughout campaign rhetoric to either appeal to voters of the opposite party or to energize their base (Arbour 2014). Further, candidates can use issue positioning to appeal to the median voter of their district and be seen as a better 'fit' for the electorate (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001).

Although most campaign rhetoric can surround issue framing, some pieces of campaign rhetoric choose to move away from the issues and focus more on the candidate. Candidates can energize their base and persuade these more moderate voters by choosing campaign rhetoric that focuses on emotional appeals (Jerit 2004). These emotional appeals are used by both incumbents and challengers alike and work to draw on the effects of fear and anger on the electorate (Jerit 2004). Although challengers and incumbents may have similar campaign rhetoric strategies, incumbents find considerable advantages when using campaign rhetoric that focuses on familiarity and experience for a specific congressional district (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2020).

With the rise of the internet and its impact on U.S. politics, this campaign rhetoric can often be found on campaign websites (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2013). Since the internet is more accessible to a broader audience, especially young people, it is a good framework for studying campaign rhetoric. Further, a large majority of U.S. House candidates in the 2022 elections had campaign websites, with only 10 candidates not having websites out of the 845 candidates. This indicates that using website data to analyze campaign rhetoric will provide a large picture of campaign rhetoric in general and can be easily found by the electorate.

Competing Independent Variables

The previous literature shows that campaign rhetoric and its subsequent ideological extremity primarily focus on issues in order to win their election, but there may be many independent variables that impact the rhetorical extremity of a candidate throughout their campaign. Although these independent variables are important, a considerable gap arises due to a focus on incumbency and a lack of discussion of approaches to uncompetitive districts.

Median Voter Theorem

Anthony Downs first introduced the median voter theorem in 1957. To summarize, this theorem states that candidates will choose positions on issues and policies that maximize votes, which means campaigning towards the voter with median partisanship (Downs 1957). Research has shown that the median voter theorem does not necessarily hold up within the real world, even though political science research has heavily relied on the importance and relevance of the median voter theorem (Rowley 1984). Further, more recent research has also supported this notion. It shows that voters are not purely rational and cannot strictly follow this theorem (Jones, Sirianni, and Fu 2022). This is due to the irrationality and subsequent polarization of the voting populace (Jones, Sirianni, and Fu 2022). Furthermore, candidates can polarize their electorate, such as through redistricting, contradicting the theory that candidates work to please the middle (Jones, Sirianni, and Fu 2022). This research points to a considerable gap in previous research because of the assumption that the median voter theorem holds up in practice.

Although the median voter theorem may not hold up in practice, there is evidence that voters punish extremist incumbents, which would support the idea of more ideologically centered campaigns. Data shows that vote share decreases the more that an incumbent supports party positions and becomes more ideologically extreme (Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan 2002). If incumbents vote more extremely in Congress, they are punished considerably by the electorate with significant decreases in vote share (Caughey and Warshaw 2019). Although voters may have punished incumbents in the past, with an increasingly more polarized Congress, incumbents are being punished less and less for their more extremist voting patterns within Congress (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2018). Moving away from incumbency, the electorate punishes more extremist nominees in general, but mainly by galvanizing the opposing party which affects turnout (Hall and Thompson 2018). This literature shows inconsistency with the relevancy of the median voter, but further, a gap emerges by this literature mainly focusing on incumbents. Without looking at the punishment of challengers, we cannot determine whether voters, in general, punish extremism. Further, this research has only been measured through legislative extremism, defined as the extremism through votes, and not rhetorical extremism, presenting another gap I will explore in my research.

Challengers

Although incumbents are punished for their extremism, challengers have not been punished similarly. Ideological extremism does not affect vote share for challengers, and that extremism is not indicative of the success or failure of a candidate (Canes-Wrone and Kistner 2022). Further, the data also shows that conclusions on previous accountability for incumbents showing that they are not held accountable by the electorate could have been skewed by how the voter treats the challenger

(Canes-Wrone and Kistner 2022). This will be important to remember throughout my study because conclusions on challengers and incumbents could be drastically different.

Impact of Primaries

The existence of primary challengers impacts the extremity of campaign rhetoric from candidates in the general election. Primaries force candidates to move further to the right or left, solidifying their positioning for the general election to be closer to the primary electorate, not the median voter (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007). This holds regarding campaign rhetoric, forcing incumbents to become more polarized, inevitably forcing more general polarization due to their electoral successes (Parsneau and Chapp 2017). Although there is evidence that rhetoric stays extremist, in the analysis of presidential elections, candidates had more extreme rhetoric during the primaries. However, they were able to shift to becoming more moderate during the general election (Acree, et al. 2020). Other than candidates becoming more extreme due to the existence of a primary challenger, if that challenger wins, they are punished severely by the American electorate. When that party extremist wins, their vote share decreases by 9-13 percentage points, and their win probability decreases by 35-54 percentage points (Hall 2015). This informs my hypothesis of the rhetorical extremity of candidates because it shows that a primary challenger could affect the uncompetitive candidate, skewing my data.

Party Asymmetry

It is no secret that American politics have become increasingly more polarized, but the asymmetric nature of this polarization is often not discussed. Previous research has shown that political polarization is asymmetric, where the Republican party has moved further to the right, while the Democratic party has not seen a comparable shift to the left (Russell 2018). It is unknown precisely why this has occurred, but a possible reason behind this shift could be due to the differences in how each party is ideologically configured. Research shows that the Republican Party is rooted in an ideological movement that will continue to remain loyal to conservative ideological thought, whilst the Democratic party is a coalition of social groups that pursue a goal of government action, staying less loyal to their ideological motivations (Grossmann and Hopkins 2015). Republicans strongly prefer ideological purity over choosing moderate policy positions compared to Democrats and strongly prefer not to compromise their ideological positions compared to Democrats as well (Grossman and Hopkins 2015). Although the median voter theorem predicts that extreme partisan politicians will be punished, this asymmetric polarization and propensity of Republicans to choose more partisan rhetoric could overshadow this possible punishment.

We can see this asymmetric polarization within partisan rhetoric. Studies of partisan rhetoric from U.S. Senators on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, show that

Republicans are more likely to use partisan language compared to Democrats within Tweets, even though they generally tweet less (Russell 2018). Although this is not a study on campaign rhetoric, these same trends on social media posts could apply to campaign rhetoric and presents an opportunity for research into this area of rhetoric.

Previous Work—Uncompetitive Candidates

There is only a small amount of literature on campaigning strategies and/or the rhetorical extremity of uncompetitive candidates. Therefore, little data supports a definitive predictor of rhetorical extremity from candidates in these situations. An analysis of two incumbent Senators in ideologically incongruent states in the 2012 midterms showed that each took a more centrist approach (Spialek and Munz 2014). However, one appealed to their centrism more than the other. Further, these candidates were more likely to point to their centrism and what that meant versus focusing on issue ownership or their opponent's party (Spialek and Munz 2014). However, this research was focused on debate performance and not campaign rhetoric, presenting another gap within the literature. Further, research also shows that candidates in uncompetitive states will choose to have more extreme rhetoric and stick to issue ownership (Allen and Arbour 2017). Although these candidates chose to focus on issues that their party traditionally 'owned,' these candidates made sure to point out the issues with their party and criticize stereotypes of their party (Allen and Arbour 2017). This points to the idea that candidates approached with this situation still tend to try and appeal towards the middle ground or the independent voter. Both of these studies only choose to focus on Senate candidates and the literature to explore how house candidates choose to react to uncompetitive districts is limited.

HYPOTHESES

After a review of the literature and exploring the gaps that were presented, a few hypotheses emerge. Since there are two competing theories on how candidates will position themselves ideologically to the electorate, I have two hypotheses.

Median Voter Theorem Hypothesis:

Candidates in uncompetitive districts will choose to employ more middle-ground rhetoric, no matter if they were an incumbent or not, because it is the safest route that restricts the possibility of punishment by the voter.

Asymmetric Polarization Hypothesis:

Republicans in Democratic districts will continue to employ conservative Rhetoric, while Democrats in Republican districts will choose to employ less liberal language and try to match their district ideology.

Neither of these hypotheses can exist at the same time, but the support of one over the other will lend great insight

into the validity of either theory. Further, I will test other independent variables that may influence campaign rhetoric due to the literature noting their possible effects.

METHODS

Overview

This study examines whether campaign rhetoric is more or less ideologically extreme from candidates in districts with an opposing partisan lean to the candidate’s partisan affiliation. I used the Cook Political Report’s Partisan Voter Index to determine district partisanship. I will not study the rhetoric of candidates who match the partisanship of their district. To further narrow down the subjects in the study, I eliminated candidates in ‘toss-up’ districts, determining the districts by selecting all U.S. House districts where the PVI was even or +1 for either party. This is because those competitive races are not the type of races I am looking to analyze with this data and that competitive nature nullifies the essential element of my study, uncompetitive candidates. If either candidate could win, there is no true uncompetitive candidate, and the inclusion of these districts could impact my results. I will measure the ideological extremity of campaign rhetoric by taking website data from congressional candidates’ campaign websites and using a program entitled *Wordscores* with the data analyst tool R to score extremity of the rhetoric found on those websites. After data collection and analysis, I will plot rhetorical extremity by district partisan lean, making sure to identify individual candidates’ parties. This plot and analysis will support one or none of my two main hypotheses. The first is that due to a large amount of research on the effects of the median voter theorem, I predict that as a district becomes more extreme partisan-wise, the candidate of the opposite party’s rhetoric will become less extreme to try and “meet the voter in the middle.” The second is that Republicans will choose to use more conservative campaign rhetoric no matter what while Democrats will choose more moderate rhetoric.

Data Collection

District Partisan Lean

The Cook Political Report is a well-respected establishment and is often a top source for partisan scores of U.S. House districts (Cook Political Report n.d.). The Cook Partisan Voter Index compares the partisan lean of each district to the rest of the country (Cook Political Report 2022). This is done by compiling how that district voted in recent presidential elections and comparing that to the ideological lean of the rest of the country (Cook Political Report 2022). Each district is then given a score, known as the Partisan Voter Index or PVI, that represents how liberal or conservative a district is (Cook Political Report 2022). For example, a score of R +15 would indicate a more conservative district and a score of D +13 would indicate

a more liberal district. I will use this data to check each district’s partisan lean and determine “toss-up” districts.

Campaign Rhetoric

During the 2022 U.S. Midterm elections, students from a political science seminar class at St. Olaf College, including myself, collected available website data from the campaign websites of every single Republican and Democrat running in a United States House of Representatives race. Data collection began eight weeks before the general election and consisted of initially identifying the campaign websites of every candidate and compiling those websites into a spreadsheet. The collection then continued with students copy-pasting the text from the home page, the biography page, and each issue page into individual text files. These files were titled as follows:

STATE (abbreviation)_DISTRICT_PARTY_TYPE
(home, bio, or issue page)

These text files did not include banner text, moving text, updating text (ex. social media feed), video text, or text that purely surrounded donations. This is due to the influx nature of these text sources. Students were also instructed to include the titles of each issue page to categorize them better later. These text files were then compiled into a shared DropBox folder. Campaign website text is an excellent source to determine campaign rhetoric for various reasons. First and foremost, campaign rhetoric can be found easily on campaign websites, and with the ease of the internet and access to website builders, we can collect data from almost every house race, unlike if we solely focused on campaign ads (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2013; 2010). In total, we identified 806 candidates and compiled 7,522 text files from their websites. Due to the project parameters, I only used 386 candidates. Furthermore, I only used the issue pages of each candidate due to the likelihood that partisan language will be there and to match the reference texts I will use, which I detail in the next section.

As Table 1 shows, in total, there were 165 Democratic Candidates and 155 Republican Candidates. This is a fairly even distribution between both parties and will benefit my study by not skewing the scope of the study to one party or the other.

Dependent Variable: Ideological Rhetorical Extremity

The dependent variable is *the partisan extremity of the campaign rhetoric* from candidates. Using the data from

	Democrats	Republicans
Number	165	155

campaign website texts, I used the machine learning program entitled *Wordscores* in R (Benoit, Laver, and Lowe n.d.). This program analyzes text against predetermined, by the researcher, reference texts and assigns scores to each chunk of text based on how similar or different it is from the reference text (Parsneau and Chapp 2017). The reference texts are scored by the researcher beforehand on ideological extremity. *Wordscores* is a good tool for analyzing the ideological extremity of various campaign websites because previous research has used this machine learning program successfully in the past for this express purpose (Parsneau and Chapp 2017). Still, a potential flaw of this program comes from the reference texts. If the reference texts are unsuitable or not coded right, the scores determined by the program may be useless. This is why it is vital to compile a solid reference text list. My reference texts are compiled of the issue pages from the official government U.S. Senate pages of every U.S. Senator. Using the official Senate websites allows for a straightforward view of the candidates' issue positions and gives me a better idea of partisanship. I collected every Senators' website in a separate spreadsheet from the campaign data spreadsheet. I completed the same copy-and-paste process as detailed in the data section for campaign websites. Once the reference texts are collected and coded, I will use the DW Nominate scores, a data set that tracks members roll call votes and places that data in a two-dimensional space, for each Senator to indicate partisanship and label the most Democratic senator as a -1.0, and the most Republican senator as a +1.0 (Desilver 2022, Lewis et al. 2022). Taking a cue from the research of Parsneau and Chapp, I will use all one-word and two-word elements to determine the similarity between reference texts (Parsneau and Chapp 2017). If the text from the campaign website is similar to the Democrats ideological extremity, that text will receive a score closer to -1.0. The same goes for Republicans, except the texts will receive a score closer to +1.0.

Independent Variables

Aligned with my initial research question, my primary independent variable is *district partisanship*. As noted in the data collection section, this variable will be measured through the Cook Political Report's Partisan Voter Index. Before imputing the PVI data into R, I will take out all districts with a PVI rating of even or +1 for either party. The range of PVI scores (+40 for the Democrats and +33 for the Republicans) presented a problem in the coding process because it does not align similarly with my extremity scale due to its use of only positive numbers (Cook Political Report 2022). I converted the data to match my extremity scale by making the Democratic PVI scores negative and keeping the Republican PVI scores positive. As to not limit my results, I will not use the PVI scores to just code the number of Republican or Democrat districts. This is because it is unclear before running the data for my specific parameters whether how partisan a district is affects the rhetoric from the opposition candidate regarding ideological extremity.

I also test for a number of other independent variables. First is *party identification*. Party identification of candidates was already identified through the initial data collection process. I took that data and scored Republicans as 1 and Democrats as 0. Party identification is an essential element to my study. In conjunction with the PVI data, any candidate who is a Democrat from a Democratic rated district will be eliminated from the study and any Republican from a Republican rated district will be eliminated from the study. Next, I added control variables of *incumbency* and *primary challenger*. The *incumbency* independent variable was already compiled during the initial data collection process. An incumbent was coded as a 1 and a non-incumbent was coded as a 0. *Primary challenger* required more work. According to my initial research, the presence of a primary challenge has an effect on campaign rhetoric (Brady, Han, Pope 2007; Hall 2015; Acree, et al. 2020). This is why it is important to track this variable. Since it was not coded in the initial data collection process, I created a separate spreadsheet with each candidate that I am studying and coded a 1 to equal the presence of a primary challenger and a 0 to equal no presence. This data was compiled from information from *Ballotpedia.org* because the website has a list of all of these primary races, sorted by party (Ballotpedia n.d. A, n.d. B). I went through each primary listed for each party and noted the presence of a primary challenger. When deciding whether there was a primary challenger or not, I did not include candidates who were not on the ballot as primary challengers since voters could not simply check a box to choose these candidates.

There are other variables that I would be interested in testing but are not directly related to my research question. Demographic variables have found interesting results in the past and although not discussed with the previous literature, these variables could lead to interesting results. These variables include *gender and race of candidate*. *Gender of candidate* was already compiled during the initial data collection process, where a Female was coded as a 1 and a Male coded as a 0. *Race of candidate* was not compiled. I independently compiled the race of each candidate and coded non-white candidates as a 1 and white candidates as a 0. *Party identification, incumbency, primary challenger, gender of candidate, and race of candidate* are all dummy variables, known also as binary variables.

Analysis

The ideological extremity of campaign rhetoric is a continuous and not a dichotomous variable, which means it is appropriate to run regressions. I mainly focus on the regression between the ideological extremity of campaign rhetoric and the district extremity but will include the other independent variables in this regression. I also include an interaction term between Party and PVI due to their presence in the graph I created. I graph the data of PVI by rhetorical extremity, choosing to sort by party identification and have Democratic Party ID data points show up as blue on a graph

and Republican Party ID data points as red. I will be basing all other analyses on the linear regression. Further, the package I will also be using is Quanteda (Benoit et al. 2018).

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

My findings do not support the hypothesis that all uncompetitive candidates will adopt more median rhetoric but do support the hypothesis that Republicans will continue to choose conservative campaign rhetoric, while Democrats will try to appeal towards the middle. These findings provide insight into how uncompetitive candidates choose to campaign and the effects of individual variables on that campaign rhetoric.

Data

In order to contextualize my independent variables, I separated my 4 bivariate variables into two categories, Democrats and Republicans. As Table 2 demonstrates, there are very few incumbents from uncompetitive districts. Before even running any regressions, I can tell that incumbency is not going to have an impact on the extremity of campaign rhetoric due to this small number. Furthermore, according to Table 3, there are fewer female candidates in general, and even fewer Republican female candidates. Other than these discrepancies, the distribution between Democrats and Republicans is pretty even. For example, there were 105 white Democratic candidates and 104 white Republican candidates.

Table 2: Data, cont'd.

	Incumbents	Non-Incumbents
Number	14	306

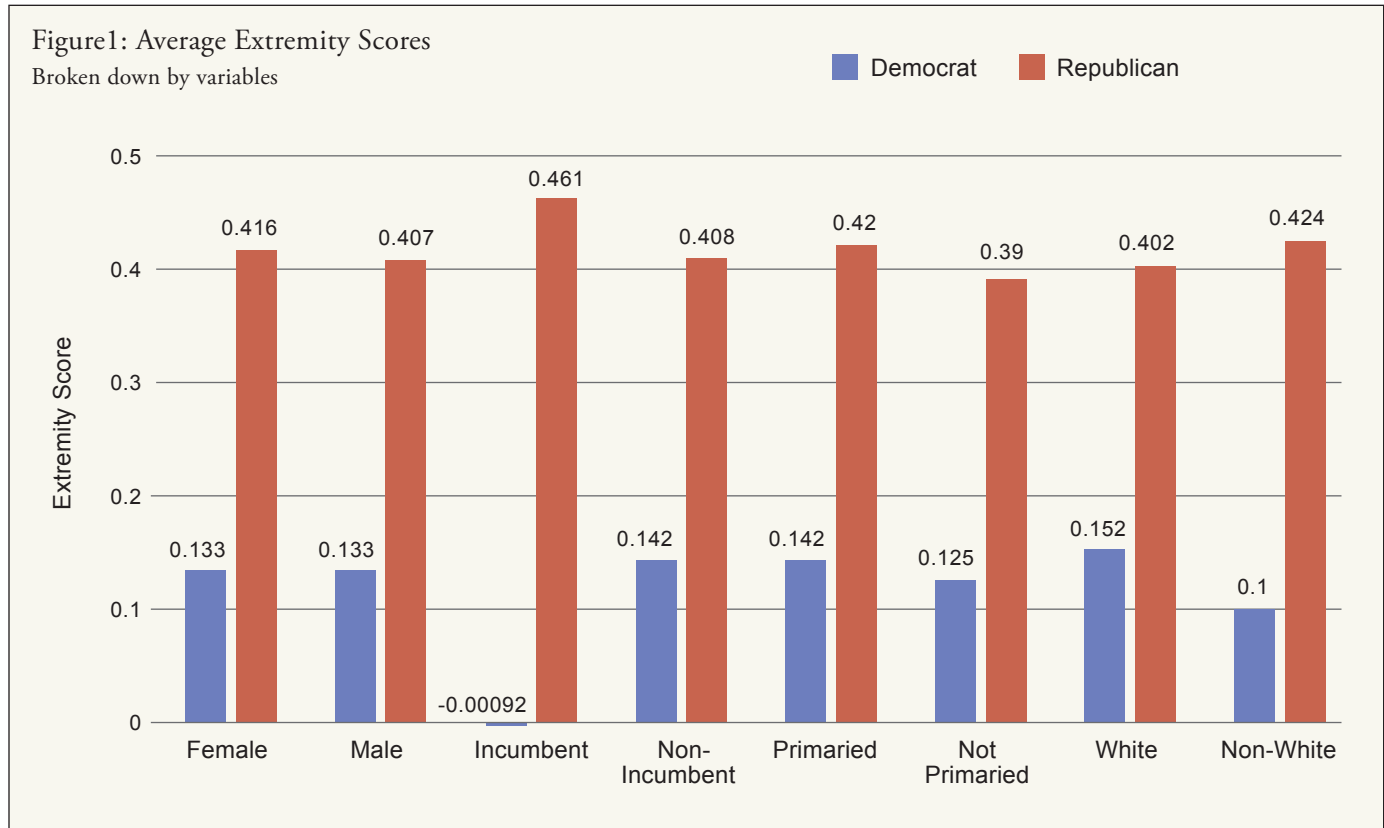
Table 3: Data; cont'd.

	Female	Male	Incumbent	Non-Incumbent
Democrats	74	91	10	155
Republicans	34	121	4	151

	Primaried	Not Primaried	White	Non-White
Democrats	78	87	105	60
Republicans	98	57	104	51

Extremity Scores

Unexpectedly, the average extremity scores are not what I predicted within Hypothesis I, III, or IV, but they do strongly support Hypothesis II. The average extremity score of the campaign rhetoric from Democratic candidates in Republican districts was 0.133 (see figure 1). This means that the rhetoric from Democrats was slightly more conservative than what one would expect out of a Democratic congressional candidate.



This result is both aligned with the idea of the median voter theorem, meaning their rhetoric becomes more moderate, trying to appeal to the “median voter,” and the ideas espoused within the asymmetric polarization theories that Democrats are less loyal to their partisan leanings.

However, the average extremity score for Republican candidates running in Democratic districts is 0.409 (see figure 1). This does not follow the same pattern seen from the Democratic Candidates in Republican districts and directly contradicts the Median Voter Theorem Hypothesis that Republican candidates in Democratic districts would try to use more moderate or slightly liberal campaign rhetoric. On the other hand, this data does support the hypothesis that Republicans remain loyal to conservative rhetoric due to asymmetric polarization. Breaking down by the bivariate variables, the average extremity of Democratic candidates in Republican districts remained similar to the previously found average and the average extremity of Republican candidates in Democratic districts also remained similar to the previously found average. For Democrats, female and male candidates had the exact same average extremity score of 0.133, while Republican women had a 0.416 average and men had a 0.407 average. Democrats who faced a primary challenger had an average extremity score of 0.142 and those who did not had a score of 0.125. Republicans who faced a primary challenger had an extremity score of 0.42 and those who did not had an extremity score of 0.390. White Democratic candidates had

an extremity score of 0.152, and non-white candidates had an extremity score of .0999. White Republican candidates had an average score of 0.402 and non-white candidates had an average score of 0.424. Again, these numbers remain fairly consistent with the previously found average data from Figure 1. The incumbency variable had extremity scores that were the most varied from the original average. According to Figure 1, Democratic incumbents were the only democratic group to have a negative average score. Republican incumbents were also more extreme than the average, with a score of 0.461. These findings vary from the literature that states that incumbents have less extreme rhetoric, but we must take into account that there are only 14 incumbents to calculate and average from, a much smaller group compared to the other data points.

Another interesting finding from this set of averages is the primary vs non-primary candidates. According to the previous literature on the subject, it was expected that candidates who were primaried would have more extreme rhetoric, but according to my data, Figure 1 shows me that the presence of a primary challenger did not change rhetorical extremity and therefore does not support previous conclusions in the literature.

To further analyze these bivariate variables and the variable of PVI, I used a regression to see which variables drove rhetorical extremity. The results from Table 3 make it clear that only the variables of Party - GOP and PVI significantly affected

Table 3: Impact of competitive districts on campaign rhetoric.¹

	DV: Extremity of Campaign Website Rhetoric			
	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value
(Intercept)	0.07	0.03	2.53	0.01*
PVI	0.00	0.00	2.29	0.02*
Party - GOP	0.34	0.03	9.72	< 2×10 ⁻¹⁶ ***
Race	-0.01	0.01	-0.75	0.45
Incumbent	-0.06	0.04	-1.47	0.14
Gender	0.00	0.01	0.30	0.76
Primary	0.01	0.01	0.96	0.33
PVI : Party - GOP	-0.00	0.00	-1.22	0.22
	Multiple	Adjusted	—	—
R-sq	0.45	0.44	—	—

¹ I ran a regression with the interaction term between Primary : Incumbent and it was not significant.

Note: Table reports unstandardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients, except the “take again” model. “Take again” reports exponentiated coefficients from a linear regression. Dependent variables are coded so that higher scores indicate higher performance evaluation. Estimates are significant at +p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

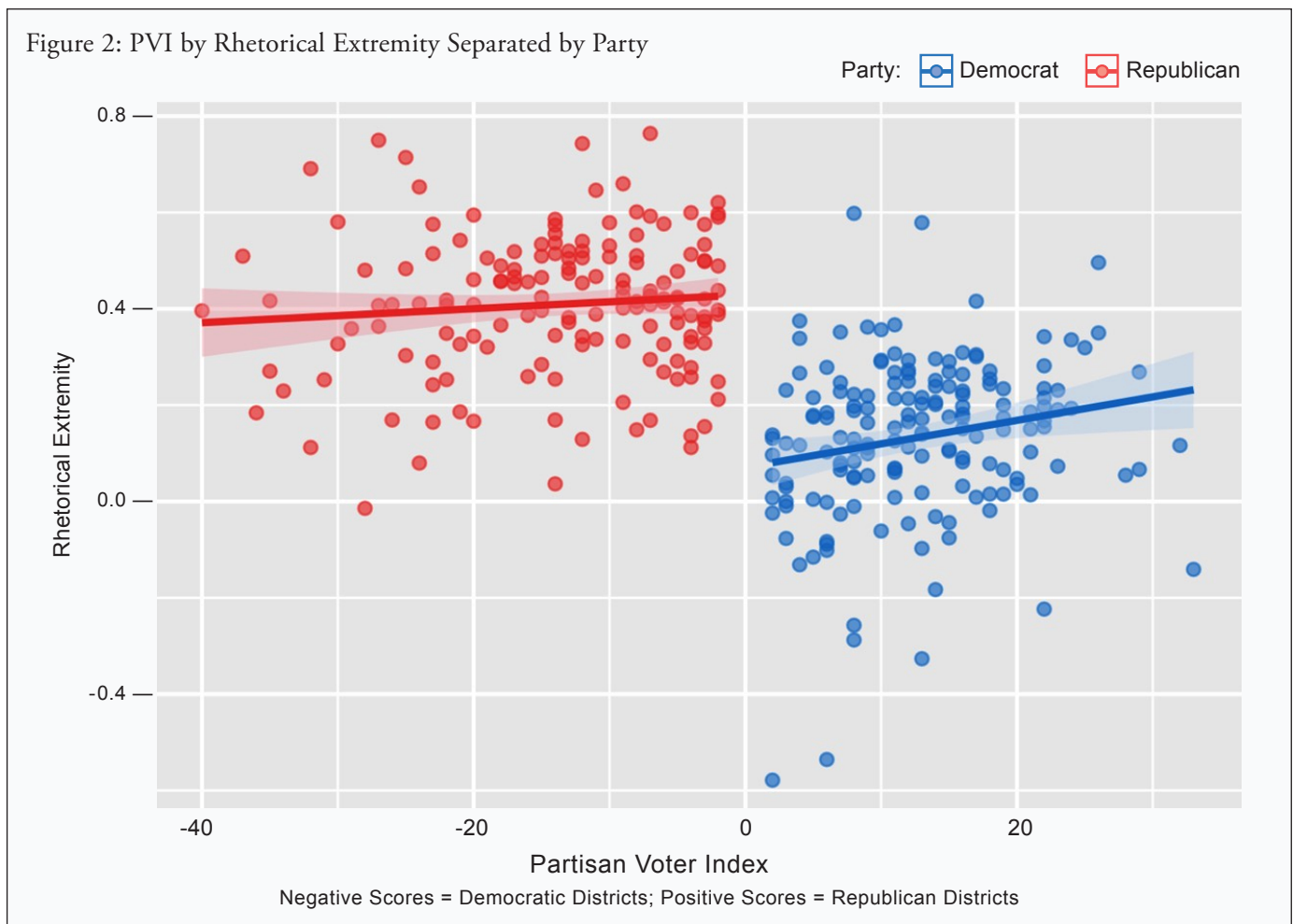
campaign rhetoric. The demographic variables of gender and race had no significant impact on campaign rhetoric, with P-Values 0.7604 and 0.4523. Further, the insignificant impact on campaign rhetoric from the variables of incumbency and primary back up my findings from the previous section, with P-Values of 0.1406 and 0.3342. Since the variables of PVI and Party - GOP do have significance, I decided to also run a regression with an interaction term between those two variables. However, this interaction, PVI : Party - GOP, was not significant. This tells me that the interaction between PVI and Party - GOP does not have a significant impact on campaign rhetoric, while the variables separately do. Based on the extremely low P value of the Party - GOP variable, I can conclude that the party of a candidate in an uncompetitive district has the most effect on their campaign rhetoric.

In Figure 2, I chose to plot the relationship between PVI and rhetorical extremity and defining cases by the Party. This figure shows that Republicans in Democratic districts only used conservative campaign rhetoric, with only one candidate having a liberal/moderate extremity score. Democrats in Republican districts have more variety, with some candidates using more liberal campaign rhetoric, but in general Democrats' campaign

rhetoric is more conservative. This is an interesting finding because it suggests that uncompetitive candidates will really only choose to use more conservative campaign rhetoric, no matter if they are Republican or Democrat, strongly supporting the asymmetric polarization hypothesis.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, this research supports the idea that Republicans remain ideologically loyal, while Democrats do not. Republican uncompetitive candidates continued to use campaign rhetoric that is more conservative, whilst Democratic uncompetitive candidates try to use campaign rhetoric that is more moderate, swaying towards conservative rhetoric. Further, this tells us that these parties approach the challenge of an uncompetitive district very differently. My research fits into the literature by expanding on the uncompetitive candidate literature and filling the gaps within this literature by focusing on both campaign rhetoric and house districts. This research further shows that the previous findings of the importance of incumbency and primary challenge are not significant for uncompetitive candidates in regards to the extremity of their campaign rhetoric and that



incumbency and primary challenge really only matter for Democrats in Democratic districts, Republicans in Republican districts, or competitive districts. Furthermore, this research shows that the median voter theorem is not as sound as the literature suggests and that the theories of ideological loyalty of Republicans and propensity to compromise of Democrats hold true within campaign rhetoric, even with uncompetitive candidates. Further research is needed on uncompetitive candidates and the median voter theorem in order to understand if the median voter theorem has less importance and replicating this research structure on data from the old district maps circa before the 2022 redistricting will lead to more insight if the phenomenon I found with the average rhetorical extremity of uncompetitive candidates continues.

However, there are some limitations to this research. When looking at the campaign website text from the one Republican candidate that had more liberal rhetorical extremity, I found a potential issue that can be corrected in further research. This candidate was the Republican from New York's 14th District, the same district home to Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, also known as AOC. Within the Republican's website text, the issue pages mention AOC often and her policies, contributing to the negative score seen within the data. When checking other candidates at random, I did not find this pattern to persist, but future research can correct for this possible error by eliminating mentions of the opposing candidate when copying over campaign website text.

Republicans were predicted to have a huge "red wave" in the 2022 Midterm elections, but after the elections occurred on November 8th, they barely won a majority. Republicans needed to flip many Democratic districts but did not do so. Their rhetorical extremity and unwillingness to adapt their rhetoric to be more moderate or liberal could be the reason why, but further research on this needs to occur before a conclusion is crafted. ■

REFERENCES

- Acree, Brice D.L., Justin H. Gross, Noah A. Smith, Yanchuan Sim, and Amber E. Boydston. 2020. "Etch-a-Sketching: Evaluating the Post-Primary Rhetorical Moderation Hypothesis." *American Politics Research* 48(1): 99–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X18800017>
- Allen, Neal, and Brian K. Arbour. 2017. "Democratic Campaign Rhetoric and Framing in Republican States." Chap. 4 In *Political Communication & Strategy: Consequences of the 2014 Midterm Elections*, eds. Tauna S. Sisco, Jennifer C. Lucas, and Christopher J. Galdieri. Akron, OH: University of Akron Press.
- Ansolahehere, Stephen, James M. Snyder, and Charles Stewart. 2001. "Candidate Positioning in U.S. House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(1): 136–159. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2669364>
- Arbour, Brian. 2014. "Issue Frame Ownership: The Partisan Roots of Campaign Rhetoric." *Political Communication* 31(4): 604–627. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2013.852639>
- Ballotpedia, n.d. "United States House Democratic Party Primaries, 2022." Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_House_Democratic_Party_primaries,_2022 (Accessed December 23, 2023).
- Ballotpedia, n.d. "United States House Republican Party Primaries, 2022." Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_House_Republican_Party_primaries,_2022 (Accessed December 23, 2023).
- Benoit, Kenneth, Michael Laver, and Will Lowe, n.d. "Wordscores Homepage." https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/wordscores/ (Accessed December 23, 2023).
- Benoit, Kenneth, Kohei Watanabe, Haiyan Wang, Paul Nulty, Adam Obeng, Stefan Müller, and Akitaka Matsuo. 2018. "Quanteda: An R Package for the Quantitative Analysis of Textual Data." *Journal of Open Source Software* 3(30): 774. <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.00774>
- Brady, David W., Hahrie Han, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2007. "Primary Elections and Candidate Ideology: Out of Step with the Primary Electorate?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32(1): 79–105. <https://doi.org/10.3162/036298007X201994>
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, David W. Brady, and John F. Cogan. 2002. "Out of Step, out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting." *The American Political Science Review* 96(1): 127–40. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055402004276>
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, and Michael R. Kistner. 2022. "Out of Step and Still in Congress? Electoral Consequences of Incumbent and Challenger Positioning Across Time." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 17(3): 389–420. <https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00019222>
- Caughey, Devin, and Christopher Warshaw. 2019. "Electoral Accountability for Ideological Extremism in American Elections." Paper prepared for the Northeast Political Methodology Meeting, New York University.
- Cook Political Report, n.d. "About Us." Cook Political Report. <https://www.cookpolitical.com/about> (Accessed December 23, 2023).
- Cook Political Report, 2022. "2022 Cook PVISM: District Map and List." Cook Political Report. <https://www.cookpolitical.com/cook-pvi/2022-partisan-voting-index/district-map-and-list>
- Desilver, Drew. 2022. "The Polarization in Today's Congress Has Roots That Go Back Decades." *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/03/10/the-polarization-in-todays-congress-has-roots-that-go-back-decades/>.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy." *Journal of Political Economy* 65(2): 135–150. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1827369>
- Druckman, James N., Martin J. Kifer, and Michael Parkin. 2010. "Timeless Strategy Meets New Medium: Going Negative on Congressional Campaign Web Sites, 2002–2006." *Political Communication* 27(1): 88–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600903502607>
- Druckman, James N. 2004. "Priming the Vote: Campaign Effects in a U.S. Senate Election." *Political Psychology* 25(4): 577–94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00388.x>
- Druckman, James N., Martin J. Kifer, and Michael Parkin. 2013. "U.S. Congressional Campaign Communications in an Internet Age." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 24(1): 20–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2013.832255>

- Druckman, James N., Martin J. Kifer, and Michael Parkin. 2020. "Campaign Rhetoric and the Incumbency Advantage." *American Politics Research* 48(1): 22–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X18822314>
- Grossmann, Matt, and David A. Hopkins. 2015. "Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats: The Asymmetry of American Party Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 13(1): 119–139. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592714003168>
- Hacker, Jacob S., and Paul Pierson. 2015. "Confronting Asymmetric Polarization." In *Solutions to Political Polarization in America*, ed. Nathaniel Persily. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. chapter, 59–70.
- Hall, Andrew B. 2015. "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?" *American Political Science Review* 109(1): 18–42. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000641>
- Hall, Andrew B., and Daniel M. Thompson. 2018. "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees? Candidate Ideology and Turning Out the Base in US Elections." *American Political Science Review* 112(3): 509–524. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000023>
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. "How Do Campaigns Matter?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 18(1): 31–47. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-072012-113556>
- Jerit, Jennifer. 2004. "Survival of the Fittest: Rhetoric During the Course of an Election Campaign." *Political Psychology* 25(4): 563–575. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00387.x>
- Jones, Matthew I., Antonio D. Sirianni, and Feng Fu. 2022. "Polarization, Abstention, and the Median Voter Theorem." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9(1): 43. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01056-0>
- Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet (2022). *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*. <https://voteview.com/>
- Mansbridge, Jane. 2003. "Rethinking Representation." *The American Political Science Review* 97(4): 515–528. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3593021>
- Parsneau, Kevin, and Christopher Chapp. 2017. "Partisan Extremity in the 2014 Midterm Elections." Chap. 2 In *Political Communication & Strategy: Consequences of the 2014 Midterm Elections*, eds. Tauna S. Sisco, Jennifer C. Lucas, and Christopher J. Galdieri. Akron, OH: University of Akron Press.
- Rowley, Charles K. 1984. "The Relevance of the Median Voter Theorem." *Zeitschrift Für Die Gesamte Staatswissenschaft / Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 140(1): 104–126. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40750679>
- Russell, Annelise. 2018. "U.S. Senators on Twitter: Asymmetric Party Rhetoric in 140 Characters." *American Politics Research* 46(4): 695–723. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673x17715619>
- Spialek, Matthew L, and Stevie M Munz. 2014. "Survival Strategies in Solidly Partisan States An Analysis of Centrist Appeals in 2012 U.S. Senate Debates." *Speaker & Gavel* 51(1): 16–31.
- Tausanovitch, Chris, and Christopher Warshaw. 2018. "Does the Ideological Proximity Between Candidates and Voters Affect Voting in U.S. House Elections?" *Political Behavior* 40(1): 223–245. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-017-9437-1>