

Fire Congress, Vote Out Incumbents

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For politicians to do what is right, first citizens must do what is right.

Of all the many, many stupid things that most Americans do, nothing is more insane than the ritual every two years of reelecting incumbent members of Congress. Countless opinion polls find that the public has incredibly low levels of positive regard for Congress. Just one in 10 Americans approves of the job Congress is doing, [according to a Gallup poll released a few weeks ago](#), tying the branch's lowest approval rating in 38 years.

Yet this year as in past years, unless Americans take back control of their country, voters will again reelect nearly all [incumbents](#). Often, some incumbents do not even have any significant opposition. For example, in the 2000 election cycle, out of 435 House seats, 64 members had no major-party opponent, and in 2008 every House race in Arkansas was uncontested by a major party according to the Center for Voting and Democracy. Political redesign of congressional districts, gerrymandering, is widely done to ensure reelection of incumbents or one party.

The main way that incumbents get removed from office these days is when they lose in a party primary election, or die, or get themselves into a sex or corruption scandal. Primaries often replace the incumbent with someone else from the same party who will, in time, become an incumbent. That replacement is often a more extreme partisan than the previous incumbent.

The usual rationale for this survival of incumbents given by political analysts and writers is that although the public correctly sees Congress as a whole as incompetent, dysfunctional and incapable of serving critical public interests, they somehow think that their own Representatives and Senators are worth reelecting. This, of course, makes no sense. If this had validity, then cumulatively and nationally it would make sense to keep incumbents in office and Congress would get better and better with each election. In fact, Congress has become worse and worse with each election. This holds true in a genuine bipartisan sense, as nearly all incumbents, regardless of party, do not deserve to be reelected.

If Congress as a whole stinks, which it clearly does, then it is only logical to believe that this bleak condition must result from nearly all incumbents contributing to the mess. The exceptions are not defined by simply being the ones on your ballot.

How can a democracy function and have any deserved credibility when the electorate stubbornly refuses to act honestly and appropriately to get rid of the elected representatives who have proven themselves incapable of governing with competence and honor?

There must be better explanations.

Here is a likely one. Most Americans have become beholden to one of the two major political parties even if they are not officially members of them and may even consider themselves as uncommitted or independent. Moreover, a majority of people find themselves living in places where their favored party has predominated. When election time rolls around they cannot get themselves to vote for the candidate from the “other” party and they refuse to vote for third party candidates. Or they are so fed up with an awful government and political system that they do not vote at all, or not for congressional races.

Another contributing factor might be related to the lesser evil mode of thinking. The incumbent loser that you know is, somehow, thought to be better than the competing candidate you do not know, especially one from the “other” party. Reelecting incumbents is like some form of hallucinatory fantasy deemed the safer choice as if keeping them in office will magically turn out to be different and better than in previous times. They have seen the light, gotten the message, turned the corner, become what they once promised to be, and so on. Nuts. Congressional experience is not to be rewarded; it must be penalized for rotten performance.

Third, incumbents almost always have the most money because they have already been corrupted by money. More money means more advertising and more lies. Lies work. Especially for the many information-poor voters that are easily swayed by campaign propaganda. The big popular lie of omission these days is staying completely away from their congressional record. No incumbent wants to be seen as an experienced Washington insider. If you failed on the job, why would you?

In our country effective representative government is crucial. To keep reelecting congressional incumbents that nearly always deserve to be fired is unpatriotic, subversive and antithetical to the ideals of our constitutional republic.

This year ten Senators and 42 Representatives are [not running for reelection](#). Odds are that far fewer incumbents will be voted out of office, if historic trends continue. For House elections [from 1982 to 2008](#) only one in three voters did not vote for a winning House representative and 73 percent of House races were won by landslide margins of at least 20 percentage points. The power of incumbency reduces much needed political competition which a healthy democracy requires.

If the royalty of incumbency does not stop there is no hope whatsoever of putting the nation on a much better track. It does not matter who is elected president. In the end, if the fractured Congress we have witnessed for years perseveres the US is doomed to join the list of once great global powers that went down the toilet.

Flush congressional incumbents out. Now. Or be complicit in the death of American democracy. Stop making excuses, rationalizing. Throw incumbent turds out of office. Even more important than not voting for the challenger or incumbent from the “other” party is not voting for the incumbent of your party, even if it threatens party control of the House or Senate.

If you do not help fire Congress, then you deserve to suffer personally from what the federal government does or does not do. Make your voice really heard this year.

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