Short Essay: Congressional District Profile

In a short 5-7 page essay, address the following question: How does the political environment of a district affect the behavior of strategic politicians and their campaign strategy?

You will address this question in a very specific context: that of one congressional district. You will choose one of the districts on the list I provide. (I will select districts that are likely to have interesting elections this year). I want more than just description of the district. I want you to analyze the politics of the district. If someone called you on the phone and asked you to make a bet about what will happen in the race in that district this year, what would you say?

In your paper, be sure to answer the following questions:

- What is the political environment in a given district?
  - What are the demographic (age, race, home ownership, employment) characteristics of the district? How do they make the district distinct from the rest of the nation?
  - How would you describe the political leanings and behavior of the voters in the district?
  - What are the main press sources in the district? Based on a perusal of the local press, what are the federal issues that seem to be important to local citizens?
  - How would you describe the congressional voting patterns and potential vulnerability of the incumbent in the district (if any)?
  - How would you characterize the competitiveness of the district?

- How, theory, should that environment affect the political behavior of actors in the district?
  - Should highly qualified candidates in one or both parties throw their hat(s) in the ring?
  - What should the incumbent party do to try and continue to win the seat?
  - What might the non-incumbent party do to try and win the seat?
  - What issues might resonate with the district’s voters?

- How is the race actually shaping up? Are the candidates, parties, and other actors behaving the way you would expect them to? Who’s running? Who’s not? Who’s raised the most money? From whom?

In researching this paper, you may want to consult the following (not exclusive list of) sources:

- The US Census, which provides both maps and district-level demographic information. Check out: [http://factfinder.census.gov/](http://factfinder.census.gov/) and look at the 110th Congressional District Summary File.
- Local press (see Google, Lexis-Nexis Academic online)
- For recent election results: The Secretary of State’s website, (any particular U.S. state)
- For district profiles (but you need to utilize more sources of information than just these summaries):
  - National journal: *The Almanac of American Politics* (hardcover at Copley and online)
  - Congressional Quarterly: *Politics in America* (hardcover at Copley)
- For incumbent voting behavior, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac Plus* (Copley library)
Based on your expressed preferences, I will assign you to one of six teams. Each team will be assigned to run either a Democratic or Republican campaign in one of three potentially competitive U.S. Senate races. You will work together to research and write a strategy brief outlining the political environment in your state, and draw up a detailed campaign and message plan for winning that election. On one of six days at the end of the class, the strategy team for each Senate seat will present their game plan to the class, and respond briefly, to the campaign plan outlined by the other side.

Each campaign team will prepare five separate 8-10 page documents to share with me and the other members of your team. Each person will be responsible for writing and researching one of the documents. As such, you will each take the role of a particular type of campaign professional. You will be expected to meet regularly throughout the semester to share your work with each other. This is especially important because your work will build on the research done by others. Just like in the real world, if you do a bad job, you will be letting those around you down (not to mention ruining your chances of running any future campaigns!)

1. **Candidate and opposition research. Paper Due to Professor and to Group MARCH 29.**
   First, identify potential candidates in both parties, and bring those options to your group. Your group will need to decide what candidate you will “nominate.” You will need to tell this information to the other party by MARCH 5.

   Identify your own candidate’s strengths, beliefs, and liabilities. What has he or she done in the past that can be used as the basis for a campaign? What has he or she done that could be used as the basis for your opponent’s opposition campaign? What attacks might you need to defend against?

   Now identify the opposing candidate’s strengths, beliefs, and liabilities. What has he or she done in the past that you can use against him, either in the form of an attack, or in the form of a substantive comparison between him or her and your party’s nominee? For information, check out LexisNexis newspaper articles, congressional voting records, CSPAN and YouTube.

2. **Voter Targeting Research. Paper Due to Professor and to Group MARCH 29.**
   What is the demographic makeup of your state? What are the important voting blocs? How do voter registration numbers and electoral history indicate about the state’s political history? What do different groups of voters in your state care about? Young? Old? Rural? Urban? Northern? Southern? Eastern? Western? Racial groups? Religious groups? What are their economic, social, political, and international concerns? What issues are regularly on the front pages of newspapers in the state? What do polls in the state indicate voters care the most about? How would voters in your state like to see those issues resolved at the national level?
3. **Advertising and media market research. Papers Due to Professor and Group APRIL 12.**

What are the media markets in your state? What are the options for radio and television advertisements you might want to run? How much will it cost to produce them? To air them?

Your group should have decided by now what types of demographic groups you might like to target with your advertising. If you wanted to reach specific demographic niches (hunters, African Americans, evangelicals), what specific media in your state might you choose to target? (Specific station names, programs, etc.)

You don’t have to make all of the decisions in your paper. But your paper need to lay out all of the options, so that your group can make its final decision with all of the relevant information in front of them.

4. **Fundraising. Papers Due to Professor and Group April 12.**

Research the amounts of money spent by candidates in two similar Senate campaigns in your state or in similar states. (Remember, the comparisons will be best if you look at highly competitive elections!) How much money did candidates in those other races raise? Spend? What, specifically, did they spend it on? From whom, specifically, did they raise their money? (We don’t need individuals’ names, but rather general categories of where candidates raised and spent money).

How much will your candidate need to raise? (And how much does that mean he or she has to raise, per day, between now and the general election?) Based on your candidate’s prior experience, family and group contacts, previous fundraising, personal assets and liabilities, where should your candidate go to find as much money as he or she needs to win? How much can you expect the party, and interest groups, to participate in coordinated and independent ways?

5. **Campaign Manager. Strategy Paper. Due to Professor and Group on APRIL 23.**

Summarize your campaign strategy, drawing together information from all of your team’s papers, and all of your discussions. What voters will your candidate target? Where will you raise your money? What will you spend it on? How much will you spend on advertising? How much money will you spend on everything else? Include a detailed budget. Where will you advertise? Will you run positive, negative, or contrast ads? Which issues will you emphasize? Which character traits? What personal history? Why? What are the most likely reasons your candidate will lose the election? How will you overcome those obstacles? Develop contingency plans for defending your candidate against likely attacks from the opponent.

Finally, design and describe one or two television advertisements that you will run.

**Presentations**

As a group, come up with a dynamic presentation to convince the class that YOU have the candidate, the message, and the campaign plan to win the general election. You will all receive the same grade.