Using the chapters from *Cases in Congressional Campaigns* as an example, students can conduct their own case study of one of the many competitive congressional races in the midterm elections. In order to make sure that students follow a competitive race, the instructor is responsible for assigning each student a unique congressional race very early in the semester (preferably within the first week of class). Students will be required to complete three short research papers, the length of which will be determined by the instructor. The general guidelines for each paper are provided below.

**PAPER ONE**

The objective of this assignment is to analyze the setting building up to the general election and the dynamics of the district or state. First, the paper should (at a minimum) describe the major characteristics of the congressional district or state, including:

- Geography
- Racial, ethnic, and religious composition
- Major industries
- Partisanship and recent electoral history
- Major media outlets

Second, the paper should (at a minimum) also describe the candidates who won the Democratic and Republican nominations, including:

- Candidate backgrounds (occupation, political experience, etc.)
- Primary outcomes

Finally, the paper should explain why the dynamics of this district make it competitive. There is no “textbook” answer, but a good explanation would include (at a minimum) analysis of the following characteristics:

- Did a scandal or redistricting help shape the candidate pool in either or both parties’ primaries?
- What impact did the incumbent (if there was one) have on encouraging or discouraging strong challengers? Were there important candidates that opted not to run, and why?
- Does the challenger have previous political experience?
- In the primaries, what factors (e.g. issues, news coverage, resources, voter turnout) suggest this race would be close?

**PAPER TWO**

The objective of this assignment is to conduct a pre-election assessment of the factors that are expected to affect the outcome of the election. What are the strategies and choices that the campaigns are making during the weeks and months before election day? At a minimum, the paper should describe the following characteristics of the general election, including:

- The general strengths and weaknesses of each major-party candidate.
- Endorsements received.
- Campaign fundraising sources such as use of personal funds or contributions from individuals, PACs, and/or parties. Specifically, which individuals or groups provided significant sums of money, services, or independent expenditures?
- Campaign strategies including message or theme, communications techniques, and demographic groups targeted.
- Major local and national issues involved in the race.
- Nature of news media coverage.
- Also, make a prediction regarding the outcome of the election and provide supporting evidence arguing in favor of that choice.
The objective of this assignment is to conduct a post-election assessment of the factors that affected the outcome of the election. The campaigns planned their strategies and made choices over the course of the election. What were the strategies and choices that explain why the winning candidate won? There is no “textbook” answer, but a good post-election assessment would include (at a minimum) analysis of the following:

- Contextual factors such as presidential popularity, state of the economy, mood of the electorate, etc.
- Institutional factors such as the incumbency advantage, committee assignments, etc.
- Campaign resources such as fundraising, outside spending, etc.
- Strategies and choices made by each campaign including the message or issues chosen, communication techniques utilized, groups targeted, etc.
- Other factors beyond the campaign’s control such as redistricting, news media coverage, etc.

PRESENTATION

Even though the goal of this project is to get students to explore a specific campaign in great detail, it is important for students to be able to examine trends occurring across elections. To accomplish this, it is important that all students should be given an opportunity to present their findings to the class either informally or formally at one or more points during the semester. This will allow students to compare and contrast their findings, making generalizations about the patterns prevalent in the midterm elections.

POTENTIAL SOURCES

Description of the District

- *Almanac of American Politics* (check the library’s reference section)
- *Politics in America* (check the library’s reference section)

Description of Campaign Finances

- Federal Election Commission (www.fec.gov)
- Center for Responsive Politics (www.opensecrets.org)

Description of the Campaign Strategies and Tactics

- Candidate website (students may request information such as issue papers or interview campaign officials)
- Local newspaper websites (students may contact reporters covering local politics)

Elite Analysis of Congressional Races

- *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (library.cqpress.com/cqweekly)
- *The Hill* (www.hillnews.com)
- *National Journal* (www.nationaljournal.com)
- *Politico* (www.politico.com)

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