

Sisco, Tauna S., Jennifer C. Lucas, and Christopher J. Galdieri, eds. *Political*

Communication & Strategy: Consequences of the 2014 Midterm Elections. Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2017. xi, 165 pp. (\$29.95 paper).

The midterm elections of 2014 resulted in a wave of electoral victories that gave Republicans control of the United States Senate, strengthened their majority in the House, and extended their dominance of state legislatures and governors' mansions. While members of the president's party typically lose seats in midterm elections, the Democratic defeat was particularly severe. In *Communication & Strategy: Consequences of the 2014 Midterm Elections*, the editors have assembled an informative collection of essays that describe how well existing theoretical frameworks explain the results of the 2014 elections, document important ways in which the 2014 electoral cycle differed from previous cycles, and suggest that developments in electoral communication and strategy evident in 2014 will shape American politics moving forward.

The first of the book's five sections deals with primaries. Using campaign finance data from Senate campaigns, Robert G. Boatright makes a strong case that primary elections have become more nationalized, with significantly larger percentages of campaign expenditures coming from out-of-state in 2014 than in prior election cycles. Furthermore, out-of-state independent expenditures tended to be made in defense of party-backed, establishment incumbents. In the subsequent chapter, Kevin Parsneau and Christopher Chapp use machine-based textual analysis of campaign websites to show that incumbents took more ideologically extreme positions than general election challengers in 2014, particularly when they faced primary challenges. Apparent attempts to avoid being outflanked by ideologically extreme primary challengers were especially common among incumbent Republican women.

In the section titled "Political Communication & the Republican Wave," Kenneth M. Cosgrove utilizes historical and case-study approaches to describe partisan branding efforts. Employing a political marketing framework, he argues that Republican success in 2014 was due largely to the Republican Party building a stronger brand than the Democratic Party. Because alternative explanations for electoral outcomes are not addressed in detail in this chapter and little is said about how and why one party is able to build a better brand than the other at a given point in time, the value of this chapter lies largely in its perceptive description of partisan branding efforts dating to the mid-twentieth century. In the subsequent chapter, Neal Allen and Brian K. Arbour's analysis of campaign advertisements documents the extent to which Democratic Senate candidates facing Republican-leaning constituencies emphasized issues believed to be owned by the Democratic Party while employing frames meant to differentiate them from that party. This is followed by Matthew A. Shapiro, Libby Hemphill, and Jahna Otterbacher's analysis of what candidates say on Twitter and when they say it. In line with spatial models of electoral competition, they find that candidates become less likely to take ideological positions on Twitter a few weeks before Election Day but become more ideological once the polls have closed.

The next two chapters examine outside influence on general election contests. Jeff Gulati and Victoria A. Farrar-Myers find that independent expenditures had little effect on vote shares in general in 2014 but had a modest effect on open seat races. Dante J. Scala and Tegan O’Neil analyze direct mail pieces from the New Hampshire Senate contest between Jeanne Shaheen and Scott Brown. They find that in contrast to groups that spent less, big-spending Super PACs often deviated from their mission statements to highlight election-specific issues that seemed likely to influence the outcome. In doing so, these groups acted more like political parties and less like single-issue focused interest groups.

The subsequent section of the book is devoted to Republican dominance in the South. David A. Hopkins argues that 2014 represents the culmination of southern realignment. Putting trends in the partisanship of southern office-holders in historical context, Hopkins shows that outside of districts with substantial black or Latino populations, electoral support for Democratic candidates in the South has all but vanished since Barack Obama’s election to the presidency in 2008. Caleb Orr, Dylan Brugman, Suzanne Fournier Macaluso, and Cindy Roper agree that a new, Republican-controlled Solid South has emerged, and show how candidates have responded to this development in their campaign strategies. In 2014, southern Republicans sought to nationalize their campaigns and tie Democratic candidates to President Obama, whereas Democrats sought, largely unsuccessfully, to localize their campaigns.

The final section of the book addresses the roles that gender and race played in the 2014 elections. Vincent Vecera and Danielle Currier identified gendered language in television news coverage of the 2010 and 2014 elections and integrated their quantitative analysis of that coverage with a broader qualitative analysis of political news and campaign language. Their thoughtful analysis suggests that conceptions of women’s political interests have shifted from a focus on reproductive issues to consideration of the economic interests of women. In the book’s final chapter, David P. Redlawsk, Natasha Altema McNeely, and Caroline J. Tolbert analyze survey data related to Cory Booker’s Senate reelection campaign. They find that the degree to which candidate evaluations were affected by racial attitudes was moderated by positive emotional responses to the candidates. While it is not clear that emotional responses should be thought of as being strictly exogenous to racial attitudes, this result builds on findings related to Barack Obama’s candidacies in 2008 and 2012 and suggests that the interaction between emotions and racial attitudes remains important, even in uncompetitive races for offices other than the presidency.

As its editors suggest, the wide range of topics addressed and the variety of methodological approaches employed are among the book’s strengths. The volume should be of interest to a broad range of readers, including scholars, instructors of undergraduate courses in parties and elections, and more casual observers of politics. In terms of advancing scholarly research, the chapters by Shapiro et al., Gulati and Farrar-Myers, Vecera and Currier, and Redlawsk et al. are among the most compelling contributions. Other chapters do an excellent job of situating the real-world elections of 2014 within broader theoretical frameworks. The

outstanding literature reviews and historical context provided by Parsneau and Chapp and Hopkins, for example, make their chapters ideal candidates for assignment in classes in which students do not yet have much methodological training.

The brevity of the chapters may also be beneficial in some classroom contexts, but one weakness of the volume is that some of the chapters are shorter than ideal and could benefit from additional analysis and discussion. Despite its rather limited overall length, however, the book covers a lot of ground, addressing perhaps all of the most defining characteristics of the 2014 election cycle other than its distinctively low level of voter turnout. The book should serve as a valuable resource for anyone interested in how theories about American politics can help us understand actual campaigns and elections.

Matthew L. Jacobsmeier
West Virginia University