

Minority Party Misery

Political Powerlessness and Electoral Disengagement

Series: Legislative Politics and Policy Making

This book examines the role of minority party status on politicians' engagement in electoral politics. Jacob Smith argues that politicians are more likely to be engaged in electoral politics when they expect their party to be in the majority in Congress after the next election and less likely when they anticipate their party will be in the minority. This effect is particularly likely to hold true in recent decades where parties disagree on a substantial number of issues. Politicians whose party will be in the majority have a clear incentive to engage in electoral politics because their preferred policies have a credible chance of passing if they are in the majority. In contrast, it is generally difficult for minority party lawmakers to get a hearing on—much less advance—their preferred policies, particularly when institutional rules inside Congress favor the majority party. Instead, minority party lawmakers spend most of their time fighting losing battles against policy proposals from the majority party. *Minority Party Misery* examines the consequences of the powerlessness that politicians feel from continually losing battles to the majority party in Congress. Its findings have important consequences for democratic governance, as highly qualified minority party politicians may choose to leave office due to their dismal circumstances rather than continue to serve until their party eventually reenters the majority.

Jacob F.H. Smith is Assistant Research Professor of Statistical Science at Duke University, where he also previously held the position of Lecturing Fellow in the Thompson Writing Program.

“Minority Party Misery will advance research on congressional elections—especially retirement, recruitment, candidate emergence, candidate quality, etc.—as well as fill in gaps in the political science literature on Members' motives in choosing whether to run for re-election. Smith pulls together a remarkable amount of existing research in building his theory. . .this book fills gaps.”

—Bill Connelly, Washington and Lee University

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Jacob F. H. Smith



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