

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT*The Rise of the
'Safe' District*

"On the Decline of Competition in Congressional Elections" by John A. Ferejohn, in *The American Political Science Review* (Mar. 1977), 1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

There has been a marked decline in competition for seats in the U.S. House of Representatives since the mid-1950s. Some observers claim that the so-called "marginal" districts have vanished due to redistricting; others suggest that incumbents edge out challengers because of their increased ability to communicate with constituents. But Ferejohn, a political scientist at the California Institute of Technology, argues instead that voter behavior has changed.

Rejecting the redistricting argument, Ferejohn shows that similar declines in competition have taken place in unredistricted congressional districts. In a review of non-Southern states, for example, he finds that the number of "competitive" seats (winner received less than 60 percent of the vote) in redistricted districts dropped from 51 in 1962 to 40 in 1966; during the same period, competitive seats in unredistricted districts dropped from 51 to 28.

Ferejohn suggests that there has been a decline in the electorate's "party identifiers"—citizens whose votes are determined by a candidate's party affiliation. Many party identifiers "are behaving more like Independents." However, "issue voting" has not markedly increased. Instead, it appears that "incumbency voting" has replaced party voting as a kind of "shorthand cue" in the voting booth. (Such voter rules of thumb are common in "low-information" congressional elections.) One effect is to reduce the number of competitive seats.

*The Social Costs
of Urban Renewal*

"What Happened to Urban Renewal?" by Bruce L. Jaffee, in *Business Horizons* (Feb. 1977), Graduate School of Business, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

Between 1950 and 1974, 76 percent of federal grants for urban renewal projects were for construction. By the end of this 25-year program, roughly half of the 2,102 construction projects had been completed; more housing units had been demolished than constructed, and seven states had received more than half of the \$10 billion in total federal assistance. What has been the lasting effect?

One of the major goals of the 1949 National Housing Act (the major urban renewal legislation), says Jaffee, professor of business at Indiana University, was "a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family." But he reports that under urban renewal low-income families were forced out of central city slums and thus had to compete for a reduced supply of low-cost housing elsewhere. Few could afford to return to the "redeveloped" neighborhoods.