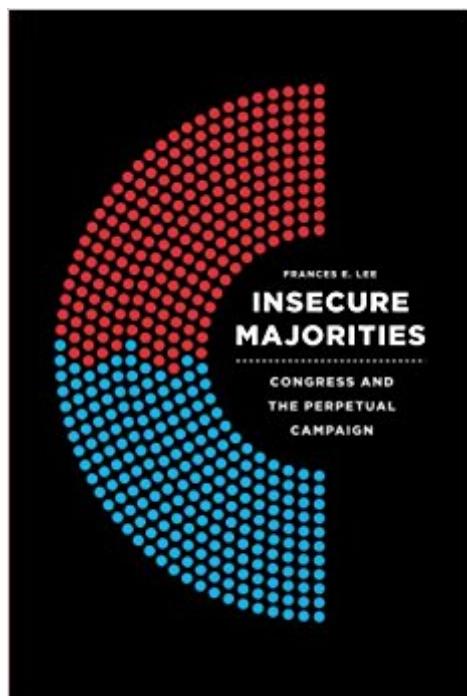


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Insecure Majorities: Congress And The Perpetual Campaign



Synopsis

As Democrats and Republicans continue to vie for political advantage, Congress remains paralyzed by partisan conflict. That the last two decades have seen some of the least productive Congresses in recent history is usually explained by the growing ideological gulf between the parties, but this explanation misses another fundamental factor influencing the dynamic. In contrast to politics through most of the twentieth century, the contemporary Democratic and Republican parties compete for control of Congress at relative parity, and this has dramatically changed the parties' incentives and strategies in ways that have driven the contentious partisanship characteristic of contemporary American politics. With *Insecure Majorities*, Frances E. Lee offers a controversial new perspective on the rise of congressional party conflict, showing how the shift in competitive circumstances has had a profound impact on how Democrats and Republicans interact. For nearly half a century, Democrats were the majority party, usually maintaining control of the presidency, the House, and the Senate. Republicans did not stand much chance of winning majority status, and Democrats could not conceive of losing it. Under such uncompetitive conditions, scant collective action was exerted by either party toward building or preserving a majority. Beginning in the 1980s, that changed, and most elections since have offered the prospect of a change of party control. Lee shows, through an impressive range of interviews and analysis, how competition for control of the government drives members of both parties to participate in actions that promote their own party's image and undercut that of the opposition, including the perpetual hunt for issues that can score political points by putting the opposing party on the wrong side of public opinion. More often than not, this strategy stands in the way of productive bipartisan cooperation—and it is also unlikely to change as long as control of the government remains within reach for both parties.

Book Information

Paperback: 248 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press (August 23, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022640904X

ISBN-13: 978-0226409047

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #119,112 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #62 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > United States > Legislative Branch #110 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Elections & Political Process > Political Parties #186 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Elections & Political Process > Elections

Customer Reviews

With *Insecure Majorities*, Lee explores one of the most important questions for understanding American national politics today: how can we explain the emergence of the highly partisan contemporary Congress? With creativity and analytical rigor, she offers a compelling alternative to the conventional wisdom that increased ideological polarization has driven the conflict between the congressional parties. Lee argues instead that the "struggle for institutional power" increases incentives for highly partisan behavior and lowers incentives for legislating solutions. • (Sarah Binder, George Washington University and the Brookings Institution) *Insecure Majorities* is a major contribution to our understanding of Congress and American national politics. Lee marshals an impressive array of evidence to convincingly argue that increasing ideological distance between the parties is not the only "or even the most important" factor driving the increased partisan conflict and changes in party strategy we have seen over the past three decades. Her cogent, engaging account of the nature of contemporary partisan conflict in Congress will be widely read and discussed beyond the field. • (Tracy Sulkin, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

Frances E. Lee is professor in the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland. She is the author of three books, most recently *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the US Senate*, also published by the University of Chicago Press.

This book gives an awesome explanation of how our political parties have gone to war in Congress. They have created massive propaganda machines and polarized the public. A top notch work of political science.

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