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**NEW RESEARCH: HOW DO EFFECTIVE INCUMBENTS FARE IN PRIMARIES?
Turning Legislative Effectiveness in Electoral Success**

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (“CEL”) conducted an in-depth study to explore whether lawmakers in Congress are rewarded in primary elections for their effectiveness. Do effective members win at a greater rate during this time of the electoral cycle? Can they ward off challengers? The answer, for the first time, is clear. And it has obvious impacts on how lawmakers considering reelection should use their time in Congress.

Looking at congressional primaries data from 1980-2016 allowed CEL researchers to remove partisan cues and focus on a voting body which was highly knowledgeable and active. As reflected in current news, primary elections are where voters are most likely to know, and potentially vote based on, the ability of their representatives to deliver on legislation.

However, before now, research on electoral success as related to legislative effectiveness was murky at best. But the CEL has now clearly established that there are correlations between a representative’s effectiveness and their likeliness to be successful in their party’s primary.

While legislative effectiveness may not play a central role in determining an incumbent’s general election viability, it is certainly important for primary competition and outcomes. Within the engaged primary electorate, there is a clear accountability relationship between representatives’ activities in Congress and their electoral fortunes. Effective incumbents face fewer quality challengers and are more likely to win their primary.

This has huge ramifications given the general election outcome is all but decided in many cases as the number of swing districts has declined in contemporary politics. Electoral security in the primary is at least (if not more) valuable for many incumbents.

“This is exciting new research as the scope and consequence of the relationship between legislative effectiveness and primary success speaks directly to questions about how representatives approach their time in Congress,” says co-author and University of Virginia Professor Craig Volden. “Cautious incumbents may want to take note that electoral and lawmaking goals are not incompatible – often they are one and the same.”

The Center for Effective Lawmaking seeks to advance the generation, communication, and use of new knowledge about the effectiveness of individual lawmakers and legislative institutions in Congress. We envision a Congress comprised of effective lawmakers, strong institutional capacity, and the incentive structure needed to address America’s greatest public policy challenges.

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