

**The Fix**

# There are 405 House races where the frontrunner has a 90% chance of winning

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By **Jaime Fuller** May 29, 2014

Only 30 House races have any right to be called a "race" of any sort this year. That's 30 out of 435. That's 6.8 percent of the entire House.

That's according to our [Election Lab model](#), which found that there are 405 races where the incumbent or front-runner has a 90 percent (or better) chance of winning at this point in the election.

The [Cook Political Report](#) rates only 43 seats as toss-up or leaning Republican or Democrat -- or 9.8 percent of the House. The [Rothenberg Political Report](#) counts 51 seats as competitive, 11.7 percent of the House.

This lack of competition isn't a new phenomenon. House races have been growing less and less competitive for years. In the 2002 and 2004 elections, House incumbents had a reelection rate of 99 percent. In those two elections, 7 percent of House contests were decided by a margin of less than 10 percentage points.

The year 2010, however, broke the trend a bit. There were about 100 competitive races that year, and Republicans managed to pick up 63 seats. The fundamentals of 2010 are best explained by looking back to 2006, when Democrats managed to win a few seats in improbable places. They did the same thing in 2008, thanks in part to the strength of Barack Obama at the top of the ticket. In 2010 then, Republicans were able to win back most of those seats in places that were already disposed to favor them ideologically, thanks in part, again, to Obama.

What's the reason for the incredible advantages held by incumbents -- particularly given the "throw the bums out" sentiment voters regularly express? Alan Abramowitz, Brad Alexander and Matthew Gunning wrote in 2006 that the changing partisan makeup of districts and incumbency advantages go a long way toward explaining why there are so few competitive races. Once a candidate wins a House race, he or she almost always has fundraising and name ID advantages over any person who decides to run against them. This advantage compounds as reelection victories pile up. Some academics argue that redistricting is to blame, and that safe districts are being purposefully drawn up by both parties, erasing competitiveness from most races. Others find that redistricting is an ineffective explanation for why House races can be such a snooze.

None of these explanations perfectly explain why there are so few competitive House districts, but they leave behind representatives who are serving longer tenures than ever, raising more and more money and becoming mostly immune to the day-to-day sways of public opinion.

The Election Lab model does miss some things that have made some House races traditionally worth watching, however. Many of the factors that drove the 2010 election -- the economy, presidential approval ratings, fundraising, the experience of each candidate, etc -- are included in the Washington Post election model. However, some races have their own quirks that can make things interesting, even if data can't capture exactly why. In Colorado's 6th District, the model gives the Republican candidate a 93 percent chance of winning. Local newspapers beg to differ, saying that the race could be one of the most expensive nailbiters of the midterm season. The challenger, Andrew Romanoff, former speaker of the Colorado House, is raising more money than the incumbent, Rep. Mike Coffman. Coffman's campaign manager brushed off the fundraising totals in an interview with the Denver Post, in a way that shows niceties are not in this race's future. "Six hundred thousand is a nice haul, but it is going to take a lot more than that for Speaker Romanoff to obscure his bromance with Obamacare."

There are surely a handful more races with competitive factors that the model hasn't been able to find this early in the race, but that still leaves few races that are going to be on political obsessives' radar in the upcoming months.