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**Media Explanations for Election Results: Do They Persist Over Time?
The Constructed Explanations for the 1994 Republican Takeover of Congress**

ABSTRACT

Election results tell us who won, but not why the voters made their choices. Even exit polls provide no more than an a la carte menu of possible explanations. Yet candidates, political activists, and journalists all have powerful motives to figure out why voters made the selections they did; getting the answers can guide candidates and elected officials in their policy-making and campaigning choices and help journalists further their careers. Previous research has shown that in the weeks after Election Day, journalists and their sources tend to converge on one or a few generally accepted explanations for the election results. But do these constructed explanations persist into later elections, continuing to form a political history of recent races?

The paper uses content analysis of newspaper coverage to determine whether the explanations constructed for the 1994 Republican sweep, resulting in the first Republican-majority U.S. House and Senate in 40 years, continued to dominate references to 1994 in coverage of the 1998, 2002, and 2006 congressional elections. In fact, there was a dramatic change in the constructed explanations between 1994 and 1998, which persisted into the next two midterm elections' coverage. The paper speculates, but does not offer conclusive evidence, as to the reason for the change.