

# Congressional Incentives & "The Textbook Congress": Representation & Getting Re-Elected

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# Agenda

- 1 Recapping Party Theory in Government
- 2 The "Textbook Congress": Incentives & Re-Election

*District vs. Party in Congress**Congress Type*

	<b>District Centered</b>	<b>Party Centered</b>
Committees	Autonomous	Arms of Parties
Policies	Particularized Policy; Universalism	Party Agenda
Election Mechanism	Incumbency	Partisanship
Representation	Individual responsibility, district-focused responsiveness to median voter	Collective responsibility, ideological conflict, partisan tides decide MC fate

# Summing It Up

- ▶ Individual legislators each have a competing self-interests, even those in the same party
- ▶ Inherent structure of Madison's Model: Human Nature  $\rightarrow_1$  Factions  $\rightarrow_2$  Representation
- ▶ Each legislator needs to pass policies favored by factions to be re-elected, but making policy requires compromise (i.e. coalition maintenance) & paying transaction costs
- ▶ Parties reduces transaction costs & coalition maintenance by controlling the agenda (number of options available to vote on)
- ▶ Parties have a strong incentive to come up with *minimal* winning coalitions, why?
- ▶ Legislative parties are consistently plagued by collective action problem: perhaps a disconnect between individual self-interest of members & collective party self-interest

## Mayhew's Electoral Connection

- ▶ What is the paramount assumption Mayhew makes about members of Congress?
- ▶ What about policy goals for members of Congress (MCs)?
- ▶ Mayhew argues that some MCs might have policy goals, but pursuing goals conditional on being re-elected
- ▶ Does Mayhew contend that there is anything MCs can do to be re-elected? What is Mayhew's conception of MCs?
- ▶ MCs operate under conditions of *high uncertainty*, what does this mean?
- ▶ MCs are not certain that what worked for them in the past will work for them in the future...
  - ▶ Perhaps they take the wrong vote (red-state Democrats & ACA)
  - ▶ Perhaps they will face a better funded & well-known quality opponent in next election?

## How MCs *Act on Self-Interest*

How do MCs maximize their chances of being re-elected & continuing their political careers?

### ① *Political Advertising*

- ▶ What is advertising as Mayhew defines it?
  - ▶ "It helps a congressman to be known. In the main, recognition carries a positive valence; to be perceived at all is to be perceived favorably."
  - ▶ How is congressional advertising done?
  - ▶ Through *franking privileges*: such as town-halls, mailers, mobile office meetings, Facebook accounts, Twitter feeds, etc.
- ▶ Can you think of an example of advertising?

## Continuing *MC Self-Interest*

### ② *Credit-Claiming*

- ▶ “Defined here as acting so as to generate a belief in a relative political actor (or actors) that one is personally responsible for causing the government to do something that the actor (or actors) considers desirable.”
- ▶ “The emphasis here is on individual accomplishment (rather than, say, party or governmental accomplishment) and on the congressman as doer.”
- ▶ Key to credit-claiming is *particularized benefits*, what are these?
- ▶ Benefits to specific group or geographic concentration where the cost is *distributed*
- ▶ Examples of this?
- ▶ Must be worthy of *credible claim* by the MC
- ▶ Why would credit-claiming on non-particularized benefit not work?
- ▶ MC 1/535 members: credible to say “I personally” am responsible for passage of the transportation program

## Continuing *MC Self-Interest*

### ③ *Position-Taking*

- ▶ “Public enunciation of a judgmental statement on anything likely to be of interest to political actors. This statement may take the form of a roll call vote.”
- ▶ Is this more a valence consideration or a policy consideration?
- ▶ The political message itself is the commodity rather than “doing”
- ▶ What would be an example of congressional position taking?
- ▶ Perhaps most salient: *repeal & replace*
- ▶ Policy positions rather than valence positions





## Congressional Committees As Mechanisms of Re-Election

- ▶ How do committees help individual members get re-elected?
- ▶ Platforms for *position taking* & advertising
- ▶ Example: [grilling cabinet officials](#)
- ▶ MCs *specialize* policy expertise in congressional committees (division of labor in Congress)
- ▶ Committees can also help on deliverance of *particularized benefits* to constituents

### Committees as *autonomous* actors & norm of universalism

"Any time any member of the committee wants something, or wants to get a bill out, we git it out for him...makes no difference-Republican or Democrat. We are all Americans when it comes to that." -U.S. Rep. Anonymous (D/R-America)

# Contrasting View of Congressional Committees

## Committees as *Work Horses*

"Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work." -Woodrow Wilson (1885)

- ▶ What does this mean?
- ▶ Traditional theories of committees posit *autonomous* MCs with little regard for party leadership & norm of universalism
- ▶ Committees more autonomous during periods of less partisan polarization, why?
- ▶ "Lower levels of partisan polarization are associated with stronger committees and relatively weak party leaders."
- ▶ Committees one of the *multiple points of access*, each committee responsible for specific policy domains (subcommittees more specialized)...Congress delegates to committees to pass policy.

## Role of Committees in Crafting Policy

- ▶ Party theory posits that committees are merely extensions of party leadership exercising **positive & negative** agenda control
- ▶ Textbook Congress posits that committees mainly to serve re-election goals of members; policy outcomes "intended to promote stable policy outcomes and the electoral interests of members"
- ▶ Members self-select into committees based on **electoral considerations**, what does this mean?
- ▶ "Committee assignment process ensures that members generally will be placed on panels with turf important to the folks back home" - Evans (2015)
- ▶ While committees given distinct **property rights**, also have "ex post veto" for legislation changed on floor

## A More *Partisan* Story of MCs

- ▶ Does Mayhew present a more district-centered view of members of Congress or partisan-centered?
- ▶ Parties becoming more distinct & cohesive in Congress
- ▶ What portrait of Congress does Party Theory paint?
- ▶ Congress marred with partisan conflict, MCs maybe cross-pressured between party goals & district preferences
- ▶ "Fundamental tension occurs when a member's individual & collective interests are in conflict."
- ▶ Being "out-of-step" can have dramatic consequences on re-election, example?

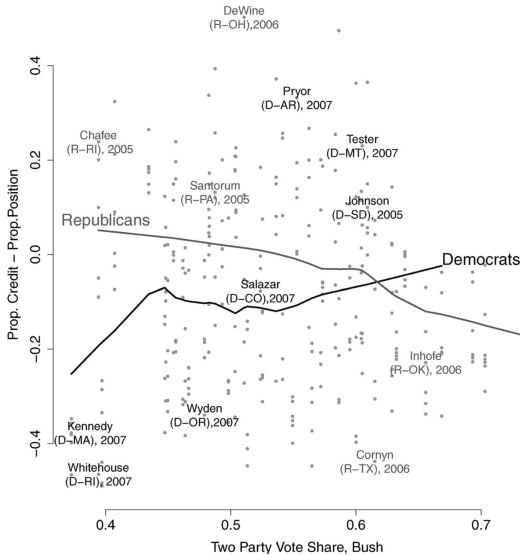
## A More *Partisan* Story cont.

- ▶ Parties help facilitate conflict by shutting out other party from legislative process when they are in the majority...how do they do so?
- ▶ Recall party theory posits that "power shifts from the committee rooms of Congress toward majority party leaders as policy preferences within each party become more homogeneous"
- ▶ Committees are just "partisan arms" of the party, exercising the will of leadership
- ▶ Potentially costly for legislators representing politically volatile districts (50/50 districts or districts that lean towards opposing party)
- ▶ In polarized & party-centered environments, MCs may

## Variation in Member Means of Re-election

- ▶ Marginal member's develop differing "home-styles" based on needs of re-election
- ▶ Main distinction is between *appropriators* and *position-takers*?  
What do you think the differences in these members are?
- ▶ What sort of activities do appropriators engage in & what type of activities do position takers engage in?
- ▶ For which member is *committee* or important and for which member is *party* more important?

**FIGURE 3 Marginal Legislators Systematically Emphasize Appropriations and Avoid Policy**



## Key Points:

- ▶ Mayhew paints a district-centered (Madisonian) view of Congress
- ▶ MCs primarily motivated by incentive to be re-elected & operate in high degree of uncertainty
- ▶ Members engage in 3 activities to be re-elected: *political advertising, credit-claiming, position taking*
- ▶ Congressional committees important for Mayhew under his model
- ▶ Text-Book Congress posits autonomous and less partisan committees
- ▶ However, as Congress polarizes, committees key to exercising party control over agenda (party theory)
- ▶ In text-book Congress, members need incumbency to cultivate support
- ▶ Politically vulnerable members still elect to stress committee service to cultivate support needed to win re-election