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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>District Centered</th>
<th>Party Centered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committees</td>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>Arms of Parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>Particularized Policy; Universalism</td>
<td>Party Agenda</td>
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<td>Election</td>
<td>Incumbency</td>
<td>Partisanship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Individual responsibility, district-focused responsiveness to median voter</td>
<td>Collective responsibility, ideological conflict, partisan tides decide MC fate</td>
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**Introduction to American Politics: Meeting 14**
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 → Factions → 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?
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