Congressional Incentives: Representation & Getting Re-Elected

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Agenda

1. Recapping How Parties Solve Collection

2. Congressional Incentives & Re-Election
Parties Solving Collective Action in Government

▶ Premium on *setting the agenda* for House & Senate party leaders

▶ What do party members get out of delegation of agenda setting powers to party leaders?

▶ **Stable coalitions** & distinct public goods that *distinguish* party brands

▶ What happens “in-government” contributes to how parties solve collective action problems in electoral arena, how?

▶ Heuristic & raw mobilization efforts by parties benefit all candidates running under the party brand (ex: coattail effect in presidential years)

▶ Politicians are *office-seeking* and what parties do in government reduces cost of election
Limits to Party’s Efforts

- Why would parties in government be limited in ability to solve collective action problems?
- American political parties generally thought of as being weak parties, why?
- Parties limited in coercing their members to vote against self-interest, why?
- American parties gaining strength in party unity, why? What explanation would Bawn et al. give?
- Comparative parties known for formal means of party discipline (withholding campaign funds, denying nominations primarily)
Congressional Party Unity during the Post-War Period, 1946-2016

U.S. House

Mean Party Unity
- Democratic Unity
- Democratic Majority
- Democratic Minority
- Republican Majority
- Republican Minority

U.S. Senate

Point ranges indicate distance between 25% percentile to 75% quantile with respect to party unity.
Revisiting A Legislature *Without Parties*

**The problem of cycling in legislatures**

Imagine there are three factions or voting blocks: A, B, and C. No single faction constitutes a majority; any two factions can form a majority:

- **A+B**
  - A and B form a majority by proposing a bill that:
  - Taxes C more heavily
  - Divides benefits equally between A and B

- **A+C**
  - A amends by offering C:
  - 50% of benefits

- **B+C**
  - B amends by offering C:
  - 60% of benefits

- **C+B**
  - C amends by offering B:
  - 60% of benefits
  - Taxing A
Solving Collective Action

- What does cycling lead to in a legislature without parties?
- Leads to unstable coalitions, coalitions that can be easily divided by another proposal
- Members of legislature delegate to an agenda setter, which controls what options the legislature will vote on
- This helps limits coalition raiding by other members (or parties)
- Party leaders are motivated by self-interest to consider legislation supported by party, if they work against party they can be fired (agents of party)
- In return, party members get to vote on policies that are beneficial to their re-election
- Party members must compromise with other party members that represent other factions of coalition (everyone supports each other & receives small set of preferred/beneficial policies)
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 →1 Factions →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

![Image of a speech by a politician]
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)
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 Harbridge & Malhota 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?
What do Harbridge & Malhorta find with respect to how voters view their members of Congress?

Partisans want their members to engage in ideological partisan conflict, little compromise

However, members of Congress from *marginal* districts are more bipartisan, why?

Partisan voters generally want their members of Congress to not cooperate with the other side

Parties help facilitate conflict by shutting out other party from legislative process when they are in the majority
Variation in Member Means of Re-election

» Grimmer (2013) finds that marginal member’s develop differing “home-styles” based on needs of re-election

» Appropriators or 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
### District vs. Party in Congress

#### Congress Type

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

- **Party Centered**
  - Committees: Arms of Parties
  - Policies: Party Agenda
  - Election Mechanism: Partisanship
  - Representation: Collective responsibility, ideological conflict, partisan tides decide MC fate
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
▶ Harbridge & Malhorta present more partisan story of Congress, MCs cross-pressured between what party wants & what constituents want
▶ MCs in marginal districts caught in middle
▶ Grimmer finds variation in how MCs behave based on what types of districts they represent (more position taking in safer districts, more particularized benefits in hostile districts)