Congressional Incentives: Representation & Getting Re-Elected

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UCDAVIS
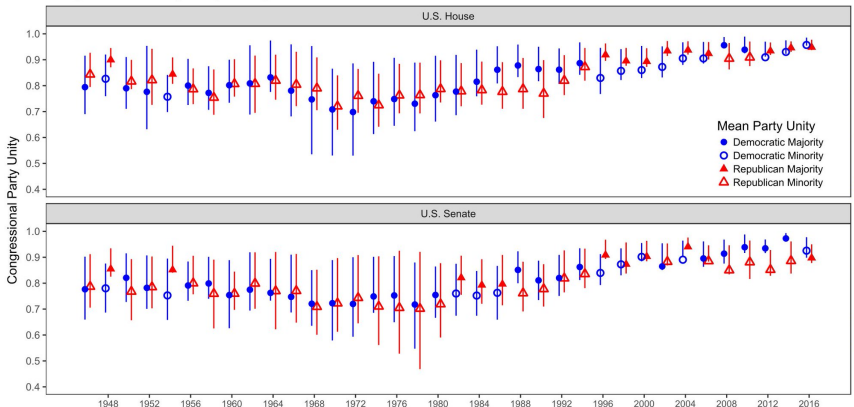UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Agenda

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)

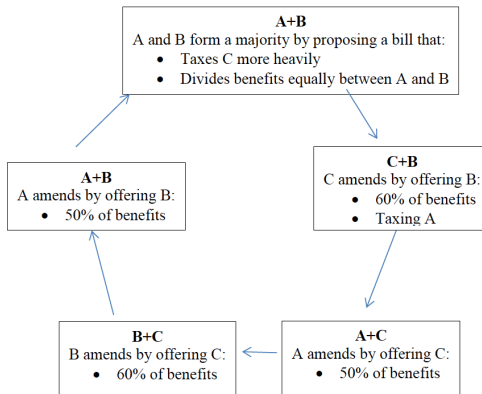Congressional Party Unity during the Post-War Period, 1946-2016

Point ranges indicate distance between 25% percentile to 75% quantile with respect to party unity.

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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

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

A+B
A amends by offering B:
- 50% of benefits

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

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

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 $\rightarrow_1$ 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 priviledges*: 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 empahsis 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

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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

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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

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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 & Malhorta 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."
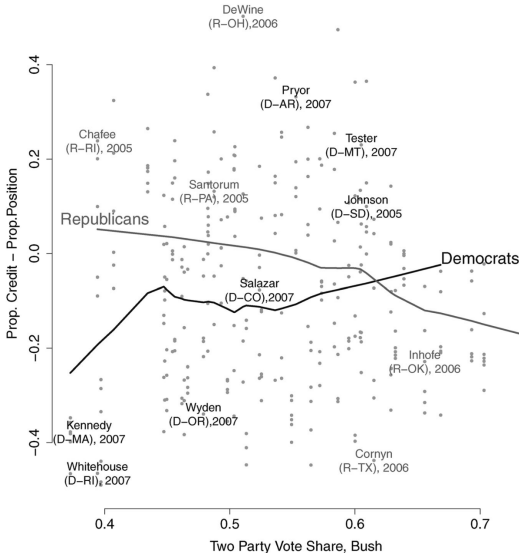- ▶ Being "out-of-step" can have dramatic consequences on re-election, example?

A More *Partisan* Story cont.

- ▶ 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

	District Centered	Party Centered
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

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)