1

Introduction

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As President Barack Obama concludes his second term, the United States faces daunting economic and political challenges, from addressing persistent inequality and the looming fiscal burden of entitlement spending associated with an aging population to mitigating the environmental risks associated with climate change. Many political observers have expressed doubts as to whether our nation's leaders are up to these tasks. Yet much of the critical commentary on governmental performance lacks grounding in the systematic analysis of the core institutions of the American political system including elections, political representation, and the law-making process. *Governing in a Polarized Age* provides an in-depth examination of representation and legislative performance in American politics.

The three sections of this volume address a series of related questions about Congress and representation through the lens of David Mayhew's influential writings. The essays in Part I review the deep impact of Mayhew's early work on Congress and legislative studies more generally, and evaluate from a variety of perspectives whether the theory of congressional behavior outlined in Mayhew's seminal work, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (1974a), remains useful for understanding contemporary congressional life. According to several of the authors, a model of today's members of Congress should add to the reelection motivation the desire to serve in the majority. The essays in Part II analyze the patterns of party organization at the state level and in Congress and detail how the partisan contest for control is reflected in the communications combat that pervades political life. Part III addresses the issue of legislative performance. Among other questions, the authors consider whether the absence of a significant relationship between divided government and legislative productivity found by Mayhew in the postwar period in *Divided We Govern* (1991) also applies to earlier eras in American politics and whether this finding continues to be valid today.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The first part of the book explores how well the electoral connection between members of Congress and their constituents ensures both political responsiveness and democratic accountability in contemporary American politics. *Congress: The Electoral Connection* serves as an intellectual point of departure for these essays, which systematically consider whether and how shifts in the political system since the 1970s have changed fundamental processes of legislative representation.

Where *The Electoral Connection* treated members of Congress as independent operators able to build their own electoral coalitions separate from national party organization, today's members compete in a political environment characterized by the highest levels of partisan polarization and party-line voting since the early 1900s. The essays by R. Douglas Arnold and Gary Jacobson evaluate how well the analytic approach developed in *The Electoral Connection* holds up in this new electoral and institutional context.

Arnold's essay begins with a tour of the intellectual landscape at the time *The Electoral Connection* was published and demonstrates the profound effect of Mayhew's research on subsequent congressional scholarship. As Arnold's description makes clear, although the particular analytical categories Mayhew developed (credit claiming, advertising, position taking) have been used in subsequent scholarship, Mayhew's analytical strategy has arguably had a deeper effect. Prior to writing *The Electoral Connection*, Mayhew spent time as an American Political Science Association Congressional Fellow and had the opportunity to observe directly the complex constellation of motivations of our national legislators. However, when Mayhew turned to theorizing he employed a conscious simplification of legislators' motivations and argued that Members of Congress (MCs) can be usefully *modeled* as single minded seekers of reelection. This modeling decision, in both its parsimony and in its selection of reelection rather than other potential motivations (progressive ambition, good policy, power within the legislature, positioning for a career outside the legislature, pursuit of personal ideological ends, etc.) turned out to be an inspired choice, as demonstrated by its enormous and durable explanatory power. Further, the analytical choice to build a theory of Congress on the incentives and strategic choices of the *individual member*, with the implication that any additional analytical structures, such as parties, needed to be justified in terms of the strategies and preferences of this most basic unit, has shaped a generation of scholarship that seeks to construct theoretical accounts of the role of parties in Congress.

Beyond the broader theoretical significance of *The Electoral Connection* in the evolution of our understanding of legislatures and representation, Arnold argues for the enduring explanatory power of Mayhew's work as a theory of congressional behavior, observing that individual members continue to have strong incentives to engage in advertising, credit claiming, and position

taking – the three activities highlighted by Mayhew – as they pursue reelection in the contemporary Congress. These individual incentives also continue to produce many of the collective results that prevailed in the 1970s: a focus on particularism and symbolism, servicing of the organized, and delay. In a world in which members of Congress continue to be rewarded for taking popular positions and delivering goods to local constituents, the core logic of the electoral connection remains in place.

This is not to say that nothing important has changed. Arnold observes that members of Congress vote much more on party lines than in the past, and party organizations play a much more active role in congressional deliberations. But Arnold argues that these shifts are rooted in individual members' electoral calculations: the southern realignment and the nationalization of elections have changed the optimal strategy for gaining reelection. Democratic and Republican members of Congress now come from quite distinct types of constituencies and they each face an environment where nationally oriented interest groups reward candidates for partisan and ideological loyalty. This new context dictates that pursuing reelection now involves a greater degree of partisan voting than in the past. It does not, however, logically imply the need for altering the parsimonious member-level reelection-oriented politician formulation to include the independent influence of "political party" to explain the greater partisan conformity we see in roll call voting.

Jacobson agrees with Arnold's contention that electoral incentives remain as potent as ever but proposes extending Mayhew's original formulation to add the member's desire to serve in the majority. This may easily be considered a friendly amendment, as it is natural that Mayhew did not focus on majority status in the 1970s, a time when the Democrats had held a firm majority of seats for decades and seemed to be the permanent majority party. Mayhew might even agree with Jacobson that MCs could believe that "it might even be worth trading a modest reduction in the probability of reelection for an increase in the probability of serving in the majority." However, this would have had no empirical relevance as Mayhew wrote in the 1970s, since in the prior era majority party status was not thought to be in question.

Jacobson also highlights a second significant change in the MC's electoral environment since the 1970s. In the modern era, the option of "build[ing] a power base that is substantially independent of party" (Mayhew 1974a) is no longer available. Jacobson demonstrates that the individual member's ability to build a personal vote that can withstand national partisan forces has greatly eroded. In earlier decades, many members of Congress were able to win reelection even if they were in a district that leaned toward the other party. Today, voting is more partisan and precious few districts elect members of Congress from the "wrong" party. Jacobson argues that this shift has had asymmetric effects on the parties because Republican voters tend to be distributed more efficiently than Democrats. Put simply, for Republicans to win a majority of House seats, they need only win the districts that lean toward the party in terms

of their presidential vote and general partisanship. Democrats, by contrast, can only build a majority if they win GOP-leaning districts. This electoral arithmetic, a product of voting patterns, geography, and the details of drawing congressional districts, has important strategic implications; Republicans do best if the election is defined along sharply partisan lines, whereas Democrats benefit if party lines are blurred. Members' greater dependence on national partisan forces also means that they have a stronger reelection-based interest in shaping those forces. Republicans' "Strategy of 'No'" following Obama's 2008 victory makes sense in this new context: the way to win back Congress, in the view of GOP strategists, was to keep partisan divisions sharp and to deprive Obama of the kind of bipartisan policy victories that might burnish his and the Democrats' brand.

Robert Erikson's Chapter 4 provides an extended treatment of one critical issue highlighted in Jacobson's discussion of contemporary politics, the decline of the personal vote. Erikson describes the intellectual context and the aftermath of the seminal studies in this area, namely Erikson (1971, 1972) and Cover and Mayhew (1977), works that measured the size and growth of the incumbency advantage in congressional elections, and Mayhew (1974b), which demonstrated the decline in the number of competitive congressional elections. In his chapter, Erikson details how the incumbency advantage is measured and traces the changes in incumbency advantage over a sixty-year period. Erikson's analysis highlights a striking transformation: incumbency advantage – which has long been taken to be a central feature of congressional elections – has fallen substantially since about 1990. In the most recent election cycles, it appears that the edge reaped by the typical incumbent was roughly 2–3 points, comparable to the size of incumbency advantage in the 1950s, before the much-heralded increase in the value of incumbency in the 1960s through the 1980s.

This finding raises important questions for political scientists and the public. A rich literature has developed that aims to explain the origins of incumbency advantage; how well do these explanations hold up when it comes to accounting for the recent decline? Furthermore, is this shift in congressional election patterns mirrored by changes in other elections, such as those for governor, lower state-wide offices, and state legislature, which had also seen growing incumbency advantage in earlier decades? Finally, what implications does the erosion of incumbency advantage have for legislators' incentive to provide high-quality representation to their constituents?

There are two important differences in congressional politics in the 2010s versus the 1970s that are highlighted by Jacobson and Erikson: polarized voting in Congress and greater party line voting among the electorate. It is natural to consider how these developments are linked. Regarding the causes of the decline in the incumbency advantage, Jacobson suggests that greater congressional polarization and increased partisan voting "co-evolved." He explains, in Chapter 3:

any trends correlated with time will be correlated with each other, and correlations are silent about causation. Still, both logic and evidence point to an interactive process: voters have gradually sorted themselves into increasingly distinct political camps in response to the more sharply differentiated alternatives presented by the congressional parties and candidates, while the widening ideological gap between the congressional parties reflects their increasingly divergent electoral bases. The congressional parties were the first movers in this co-evolutionary process – as for example when the civil rights legislation of the 1960s initiated the southern realignment – but their drift toward the extremes was conditional on their members' avoiding punishment for it at the polls.

Erikson echoes this view and posits that there may be a link between congressional polarization and the decline of the personal vote, speculating that "the salience of the party brand limits the degree to which voters can detect nuances of congressional behavior that previously might have mattered. The result is a renewed fall-off in the personal vote in general and the incumbency advantage in particular." (Erikson, p. 24). An important research topic is to carefully model (and then test) how these central phenomena might be causally related. This research by its nature will link legislative politics (i.e., "institutions") and voting behavior.

Christopher Achen's Chapter 5 concludes this section with a cautionary note about how we conceptualize and measure incumbency advantage. The existence of an incumbency advantage has typically been attributed to the incumbents' successful efforts to insulate their positions from successful challenge though greater media exposure, constituency service, or other activities designed to produce a personal vote. These advantages are enhanced by the greater fundraising capacity of officeholders, who not only enjoy the ability to do favors that flows from current office holding, but are the likely winners of the next election as well. The advantages of office holding produce a "lock in" that has implications for social welfare if the effort to produce a personal vote or the insulation from electoral consequences that may result leads to waste or poor performance in office, or aggregate nonresponsiveness of the political system to voter sentiments.

Achen's analysis approaches the incumbency advantage from an entirely different perspective, by noting that the key thing to know about an incumbent is that the incumbent has (almost always) won an election. If we model elections as a contest between two individuals of observable quality selected at random from a population (quality is modeled as a random variable), it is mechanically true that the superior draw from the first two draws (which we will call "the incumbent") is likely to be of higher quality than a third random draw (which we will call "the challenger"). Thus, an "incumbency advantage" is produced without free congressional mailings and the other trappings of office. Achen works out a more detailed version of this model, which includes primary elections, and conducts empirical tests based on the model's predictions regarding the incumbency advantage for U.S. presidents. In the conclusion of his essay, Achen observes that his model of officeholder selection provides a

baseline rather than a full theoretical or empirical account of incumbency. Attempts to explain the variation in reelection rates both across districts and over time would require additional work and will suggest further empirical tests. The empirical success of Achen's model in explaining U.S. presidential election outcomes suggests the direction Achen explores is a fruitful avenue for further investigation.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

A fundamental feature of legislative life is that members face a trade off between cooperating with one another to provide collective goods that benefit all members – such as policies that solve genuine problems or organizational arrangements that help keep all incumbents safe – versus focusing their energies on making the other side look bad. Mayhew's *The Electoral Connection* highlights the former set of incentives – in particular, the shared goal of providing incumbents with the kinds of perquisites and opportunities that help each member win reelection. But the terms of this trade off need not be constant over time. When members of Congress place little weight on the value of being in the majority party, it is far easier to form a cooperative incumbent cartel. By contrast, when majority status is seen to be at stake and valuable, the goal of making the other party look bad becomes more valuable to members. Party organizations can be used to achieve this very different type of collective goal.

This role for party organization is the motivating insight of Frances E. Lee's Chapter 6, which argues that legislative party organizations have seen dramatic growth and institutionalization over the past two decades, and have undertaken an array of political mobilization functions that they rarely performed in the 1960s and 1970s. Following several decades in which Democrats seemed to enjoy a permanent majority in Congress, the intense, prolonged competition for majority party control since the 1980s has prompted remarkable institutional innovation and expansion. Thirty or forty years ago, the national party organizations raised campaign funds but for the most part made no attempt to shape the messages, campaign activities, or electoral strategies of individual candidates. In sharp contrast, party organizations today seek to coordinate and orchestrate the political mobilization activities of their officeholders. Parties not only communicate their "brands" to the electorate, they also take positions on controversial issues, disseminate centrally approved "talking points" and speeches to individual candidates and office holders, claim credit for good economic and governmental performance when their standard bearer holds the presidency, and even seek to undercut the prestige and popularity of leaders of the opposing party.

Indeed, a central finding from Lee's work is that the job of opposing the president and undercutting his and his party's public support has become a focal point of activity for the out-party in Congress. The idea that the opposition party should hold the president's feet to the fire has deep roots. Along

these lines, Mayhew's *America's Congress* (2002) demonstrates that one of the key roles played by Congress historically has been to mount oppositions to presidents. But can this opposition become pathological if it is entirely oriented toward short-term political gain? Is there a way to distinguish vigorous contestation from socially harmful obstruction? What role can the media and voters play in checking irresponsible obstruction – and encouraging the sorts of oppositions that Mayhew argues have played a key role in maintaining the constitutional balance of powers? The legislative dysfunction identified by many critics of today's Congress can be traced back to the very different incentives created by the race for majority party status.

The other two chapters in this section take a longer temporal perspective to assess the organization and cohesion of the major parties over the past three decades. Chapter 7 by John Mark Hansen, Shigeo Hirano, and James M. Snyder Jr., "Parties Within Parties: Parties, Factions, and Coordinated Politics, 1900–1980," builds upon classic works by V. O. Key and David Mayhew on party factionalism. Both Key and Mayhew noted the existence of "persistent factionalism" in dominant parties in many states and posed the provocative question of whether factions might function as "parties within parties" in states that lack effective two-party competition. This chapter takes a closer look at party factionalism, using a comprehensive database of primary election returns at the county level for nearly all of the states over the last century. Overall, Hansen, Hirano, and Snyder find little evidence of robust, deep, and durable factions within state parties.

A handful of states, however, did feature durable factions: Louisiana, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Hansen, Hirano, and Snyder show that these four cases displayed a common pattern of an insurgency on the political left that met with a reaction from the center and right. Each faction constructed slates of candidates to contest offices; the factional identity of the candidates then served as a cue for voters that structured voting behavior. In each case, one-party dominance meant that ideological dissent was channeled through the primary process rather than interparty competition. Party factionalism gave way when the opposition party became a viable vehicle for opposition and two-party competition displaced one-party factionalism.

Chapter 8 by Joshua D. Clinton, Ira Katznelson, and John S. Lapinski focuses on the extent to which southern members of Congress constituted a durable faction within the national Democratic Party. The authors begin with the observation that scholars employing the standard NOMINATE methodology for estimating members' preferences have portrayed the Roosevelt and Truman years as a critical period during which the distance between the Democratic and Republican parties dramatically decreased compared with prior and recent moments. This characterization is at odds with historical accounts and empirical studies of party voting that suggest that southern Democrats largely stuck with their northern counterparts in the 1930s and that interparty conflict was actually quite high during the New Deal years.

Finding these differences to be puzzling, the authors explore diverse measures of preferences and behavior, raising questions about how problematic assumptions can sometimes drive historical assertions. They argue that DW-NOMINATE scores' assumption that member preferences change as a linear function of time leads to a misleading account of ideological shifts during the New Deal era. When one instead estimates ideal points using a more flexible approach, Clinton, Katznelson, and Lapinski find greater polarization during the early New Deal years. This, in turn, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the southern shifts that eventually gave rise to the cross-party conservative coalition that dominated American politics for much of the 1940s and 1950s.

Together, the chapters by Lee; Hansen, Hirano, and Snyder; and Clinton, Katznelson, and Lapinski illuminate how intraparty divisions and interparty competition shape law making and party dynamics both in particular regions and in the nation as a whole.

PARTISANSHIP AND GOVERNMENTAL PERFORMANCE

There is no simple set of metrics that can be used to judge the quality of political outcomes in the same way as is the case with economics. This raises difficult conceptual and measurement challenges for political scientists. What does it mean for Congress to be performing well? How can we know that it is doing a good job? How can we measure legislative performance? In his book, *Divided We Govern* (1991), Mayhew offers one approach to assessing legislative performance: he develops a coding system to evaluate the number of landmark laws passed by Congress and then applies that system to compile a list of significant legislation for the postwar period. He then uses this new data source to test the common claim that divided party control leads to poor legislative productivity. In contrast to that conventional wisdom, Mayhew showed that the volume of landmark laws enacted in the United States was not significantly higher when a single party controlled both Congress and the White House than under conditions of divided control.

In Chapter 9, Sarah Binder returns to Mayhew's (1991) finding about legislative productivity and divided party control, reconsidering his argument in light of two decades of rising partisan and ideological polarization on Capitol Hill. In doing so, Binder is adopting and extending a research paradigm that diagnoses the health of a political system based, in part, on legislative productivity. How does the rise in polarization affect the parties' incentives and capacity for securing compromise on major problems of the day? Binder finds that today's polarized conditions have led to unusually low productivity and high levels of stalemate. Her analysis concludes that these dynamics are unlikely to be self-correcting. The factors giving rise to high polarization – and, in turn, low productivity – do not appear likely to change anytime soon.

Chapter 10 by Stephen Ansolabehere, Maxwell Palmer, and Benjamin Schneer takes a broader sweep in applying the basic approach in *Divided We Govern* to more than 200 years of American political history. Ansolabehere and his collaborators enlisted the students in an undergraduate Congress course in a major effort to identify each landmark law passed from 1789 to the present. Each student was charged with becoming an expert on a particular decade – reading original materials and secondary sources – to develop a database of all significant legislation on which Congress took action in their decade. This approach allows the authors both to trace the aggregate level of legislative activity and to identify changes in the type of legislation adopted. Ansolabehere and his co-authors find that the nineteenth century Congress produced far fewer pieces of major legislation than the twentieth century Congress, with productivity peaking in the 1960s. Furthermore, they argue that while unified partisan control is associated with slightly greater production of landmark laws, it fails to explain the broad contours of legislative productivity.

Chapter 11 by Eric M. Patashnik and Justin Peck evaluates legislative performance through a different lens from that used by Binder and Ansolabehere and his co-authors. Rather than focusing on productivity, Patashnik and Peck assess how well Congress does policy analysis. Patashnik and Peck note that to perform effectively as a problem-solving institution, Congress must be able to identify failures in markets and government programs and craft effective, well-tailored solutions. That is to say, Congress must be a competent policy analyst. Patashnik and Peck draw upon an innovative survey of professional policy analysts to gain insight into the strengths and limitations of Congress as a policy analyst. A key move is to break down the policy analysis process into discrete tasks, which reveals the considerable variability in congressional performance. While the survey shows that policy experts believe that Congress does poorly in several areas – such as making policy decisions on the basis of empirical evidence and explaining issues to the public in plain language – it does better when it comes to crafting policies that reflect public opinion. Patashnik and Peck conclude that the "problem" when it comes to congressional policy analysis is not a lack of access to information and expertise, but rather legislative norms and practices that fail to promote a "culture of problem solving" (see Mayhew 2006, p. 230).

In Chapter 12, Katherine Levine Einstein and Jennifer Hochschild also consider a particular facet of legislative performance, asking how Congress responds to unexpected contingent events that create some perceived need or demand for a legislative response. Unexpected events (e.g., political scandals, the rise of social movements, crises such as 9/11 and Hurricane Sandy) are a frequent, if unpredictable, disruptive force that can compel politicians to react in novel, consequential ways. Under what conditions does Congress respond to such events with new policies or other substantive actions? The Einstein and Hochschild essay underscores the many obstacles to a sustained response to an

exogenous shock. In thinking hard about the conditions in which a response is more likely, however, they take up a challenge posed by Mayhew (2005, 2009) in his recent work – that is, finding a way to incorporate contingency into the systematic study of American politics.

Finally, Chapter 13 by Keith Krehbiel explores a deep problem confronting legislative organization and performance. Krehbiel argues that there is an inherent tension facing legislators between maximizing the values of consensus, timeliness, and wisdom. Each of these values contributes to the likelihood of reaching a high-quality legislative outcome, yet one cannot maximize each of these values simultaneously. For example, provisions that encourage a timely decision (e.g., requiring only a simple majority to bring legislation to a vote) reduce legislators' incentive to build a broad consensus. At a deep level, Krehbiel argues that legislative majorities always retain the ultimate authority to set decision rules; but under what conditions will a majority choose to adopt procedures that limit its ability to bring matters to a speedy, if potentially rushed, conclusion?

Krehbiel traces how this "majoritarian tension" plays out in practice, with a particular focus on the House of Representatives' adoption of the Reed Rules in 1890. In contrast to accounts that treat the Reed rules as a "revolution," Krehbiel argues that these reforms continued a gradual process of adaptation in which the House moved toward majority rule at the agenda and decision stage. Crucially, this process was largely bipartisan: both Democrats and Republicans recognized that rampant obstructionism had gone too far in blocking legislative action, shifting the balance of considerations between consensus and timeliness. Krehbiel suggests that the Reed rules can be viewed as part of a much broader story in which legislative bodies balance considerations between consensus, timeliness, and wisdom, rather than as an example of a party-dominated transformation.

Taken together, the chapters in this part highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to evaluating congressional performance, rather than simply relying upon the volume of legislative productivity as a metric. A decade after writing *Divided We Govern*, Mayhew returned to the question of Congress's place in the American political system when he wrote *America's Congress* (2002). In the midst of popular demands for term limits on legislators, Mayhew began the book with the intuition that cutting off legislative careers after just six or eight years would undermine Congress's ability to perform its role in our political system. To test this intuition, Mayhew put together a unique dataset tracking what it is that members of Congress do that is "significant." His catalog of more than 2000 "significant actions" shows that much of what Congress does that is important does not involve legislation. Instead, members of Congress are, in large part, actors in a public sphere seeking to shape popular understandings of issues, controversies, parties, and public personalities (e.g., the president).

Crucially, a large number of these significant actions were undertaken by a relatively small number of long-serving members – among them Henry Clay,