

Examining the Electoral Connection Across Time

Jamie L. Carson¹ and Jeffery A. Jenkins²

¹Department of Political Science, The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602; email: carson@uga.edu

²Department of Politics, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903; email: jajenkins@virginia.edu

Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 2011.14:25–46

First published online as a Review in Advance on March 17, 2011

The *Annual Review of Political Science* is online at polisci.annualreviews.org

This article's doi:
10.1146/annurev-polisci-030310-221852

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1094-2939/11/0615-0025\$20.00

Keywords

Congress, ambition, accountability, autonomy, responsiveness

Abstract

Mayhew's (1974) thesis regarding the "electoral connection" and its impact on legislative behavior has become the theoretical foundation for much of the research on the contemporary U.S. Congress. Recently, scholars have begun to suggest that the Mayhewian electoral incentive may apply to politics in earlier congressional eras as well. To assess these claims more systematically, we consider four conditions that serve as the building blocks of the electoral connection—ambition, autonomy, responsiveness, and accountability. Through a detailed review of the literature on electoral politics in Congress, we discover that all four conditions were present in a strict sense as far back as the Progressive Era. Moreover, considerable evidence suggests that a weaker, less formalized version of the electoral connection existed even earlier in American history. We conclude by briefly discussing the implications of these findings on the rapidly growing literature examining the historical and institutional evolution of Congress.

INTRODUCTION

In his seminal book on the U.S. Congress, Mayhew (1974, 2004) treats legislators as if they are “single-minded seekers of reelection.” Although he acknowledges that this strict assumption represents an abstraction, Mayhew contends that it provides a useful mechanism for evaluating the behavior of elected representatives. The tenets of what is typically considered the “electoral connection” rest on the candidate-centered politics of the contemporary era, in which legislators establish their own campaigns, raise their own money, and appeal directly to voters. Voters, in turn, can punish or reward incumbents directly, by splitting their tickets and voting for candidates of different parties. These dynamics lead members of Congress to pursue various strategies—such as advertising, position taking, and credit claiming—in order to satisfy constituents and retain office. Throughout his book, Mayhew demonstrates that the electoral connection explains quite a bit of variation in member behavior and goes a long way in helping us understand the development of the modern Congress.

As noted, Mayhew’s conception of the electoral connection is contemporary in nature, portrayed largely as a post-World War II phenomenon. Although Mayhew is silent on the subject, the conventional wisdom has been that earlier political eras were too different to accommodate a strong electoral linkage between individual representatives and their constituents (Formisano 1974, Huckabee 1989, Price 1975, Swift 1987). Scholars have argued, for example, that most nineteenth-century legislators were not interested in pursuing a career in Congress (Polsby 1968, Price 1975), and therefore lacked strong incentives to heed the wishes of their constituents. Others contend that nineteenth-century voters evaluated candidates based on party affiliation rather than legislative actions (Skeen 1986) and generally did not hold public officials accountable for their individual behavior in office (Formisano 1974).

Since the first edition of Mayhew’s book was published, a considerable turn toward the study of congressional history has occurred.

As a result, “conventional” arguments on the representative-constituency linkage have been refined by research suggesting that individual member accountability increased dramatically following the adoption of various antiparty reforms between 1890 and 1920—during the Progressive Era—such as the Australian (secret) ballot and the direct primary (Katz & Sala 1996, Kernell 1977). The secret ballot had a profound effect on the electoral milieu by providing voters with a greater opportunity to punish or reward candidates individually while also giving incumbents the institutional means to develop a personal vote (Ansolabehere et al. 2000, Cain et al. 1987). With the “party ballot” in place prior to these reforms, voters were not selecting between different candidates as much as they were between different parties (Engstrom & Kernell 2005). Moreover, the direct primary provided voters with the ability to choose party nominees directly, rather than allow party elites to dictate the choices, as had been the case during the convention era (Reynolds 2006, Ware 2002). Although not stated explicitly, a direct implication of these works is that an individual electoral connection emerged around the turn of the twentieth century, but was tenuous at best prior to the reforms of the Progressive Era.

In addition, a number of studies have emerged to suggest that some variant of the electoral connection was present throughout the nineteenth century (and perhaps even earlier). For example, although members of Congress may not have always been single-minded reelection seekers, there is evidence that they have always been ambitious (Stewart 1989, cf. Rudder 1990). Moreover, multiple studies have suggested that nineteenth-century members of Congress pursued similar behavioral strategies (advertising, position taking, and credit claiming) as in the contemporary era, striving to be responsive to constituents’ demands even though the electoral dynamics were somewhat different (Jenkins & Stewart 2003, Reynolds 2006, Wilson 1986b). Still others have assumed an electoral connection existed during the nineteenth century, even though they do not test this assumption directly

(Katz & Sala 1996, Kernell & McDonald 1999, Theriault 2003). Finally, there is also evidence that voters in the nineteenth century rewarded and punished incumbents based on legislative performance (Bianco et al. 1996, Carson & Engstrom 2005), although this may have been restricted to hypersalient votes in Congress. As a result, scholars in this revisionist tradition have argued that similarities to today are apparent and that a very real electoral connection may have been present across much of congressional history.

Unfortunately, these studies of the “pre-modern” electoral connection have been largely individualistic in nature, as a general understanding of how the electoral connection may have operated prior to World War II has not emerged. This uneven development, in our view, may be partly attributable to more fundamental ambiguities; specifically, a precise elaboration of the necessary components that underlie the contemporary electoral connection does not appear in the literature. We believe that an accurate assessment of the breadth and scope of the electoral incentive requires a return to first principles. Only by clearly identifying the critical domains of the modern electoral connection can we then—through an extensive review of the literature on congressional behavior and elections—begin to trace out its historical progression and pinpoint changes that were significant to its development. These are our goals in this article. As we pursue them, we can also begin to examine the relative importance of specific institutions or legislative behaviors, as they relate to the electoral connection. This will allow us to both assess and potentially challenge the traditional accounts of when particular components of the contemporary electoral connection were actually fulfilled.

In the next section, we unpack the electoral connection in the context of the contemporary era. From there, we discuss the four conditions necessary for an electoral connection in Congress—which we identify as ambition, autonomy, responsiveness, and accountability—and review whether those conditions were present in various formal and informal manifes-

tations across time. In the final section, we synthesize our findings, posit several questions for future analysis, and consider the implications of our discussion for the study of the historical and institutional development of Congress.

UNPACKING THE ELECTORAL CONNECTION

Mayhew’s (1974, 2004) notion of the electoral incentive, and the legislative behavior that accompanies it, has become the theoretical foundation for much of the contemporary research examining the U.S. Congress. In its simplest version, reelection is the proximate goal of members of Congress, one that they pursue at the expense of all others. They then undertake certain strategic behaviors in pursuit of their reelection goal. These basic elements of Mayhew’s thesis are well known. In this section, we “get under the hood” and consider more fundamental questions. What actually constitutes an electoral connection? More specifically, what are some of the underlying assumptions that drive Mayhew’s electoral connection thesis?

At its heart, the notion of an electoral connection originates in the linkage between representatives and their constituents. In a typical representative democracy, citizens are served by political agents; in the case of the U.S. Congress, geographic constituencies (districts or states) are served by legislators (House members or senators). The linkage between legislators and constituents is electoral in nature; representatives serve at the behest of their constituents and can be voted out of office in regularly occurring elections. If legislators value their political positions and seek to remain in office—which all accounts of the electoral connection assume—they must win elections; this requires an attempt to meet the needs of their constituents. At election time, constituents evaluate the performance of their legislators, assess whether their needs have been adequately fulfilled, and use votes as blunt instruments of accountability—rewarding or punishing their representatives accordingly.

With the representative–constituency linkage forming the basic template for an electoral connection, several specific conditions must be met to fulfill the Mayhewian conception. We argue that four such conditions exist. First, an electoral connection is premised on the notion that legislators are politically ambitious, that they desire reelection. Indeed, this ambition principle is the central assumption in Mayhew’s theoretical framework. If legislators desire reelection, then this presumes that they desire a career in Congress—at least for some extended period of time—else they would not endure the rigors of a campaign every two or six years. Multiple reelection victories provide additional opportunities for power (and further stoke ambition): The longer a member serves in Congress, the more likely he or she is to gain influence within the chamber, as a function of the seniority system. This increasing influence, in turn, makes it far easier for legislators to affect policy outcomes, especially if they are key members of the party leadership or the committee structure.

A second condition is that members of Congress must possess autonomy; that is, they must be in a position to control their own destiny. This has two parts. First, members must be able to seek reelection, should that be their goal. Access to the electoral process must be open and exercised at their discretion. Stated differently, no barriers (institutional or otherwise) should stand in the way of a member’s ambition. Second, members must maintain a large degree of independence in their pursuit of reelection. As Mayhew asserts, legislators in the modern era can build and sustain their own electoral coalitions largely independent of the party organization. More specifically, members of Congress can establish their own campaign themes based on their own records of accomplishments, raise their own money, and appeal directly to their constituents. Although party affiliation provides legislators with an important “brand” name, along with a variety of services (see Aldrich 1995), it is not meant to restrict the appeal of representatives or senators to their constituents. After all, legislators may be forced

to appeal to very diverse constituencies—which is certainly the case for senators—and they do not want to be labeled as too extreme relative to the voters whom they represent.

A third condition is that legislators must possess the ability to be responsive; that is, they must be able to provide their constituents with various benefits that enhance their chances of reelection. In Mayhew’s world, responsiveness is conceptualized in terms of three electorally useful activities that legislators frequently engage in—advertising, credit claiming, and position taking. For instance, members of Congress can utilize casework, express favorable positions on symbolic votes, or secure pork-barrel projects to curry favor with their constituents. It is their positions in Congress—whether as party leaders or key members of relevant committees—that offer legislators the opportunity to engage in these types of activities. Moreover, legislative actions must be salient, or visible, so that constituents fully recognize the important role of the legislator in generating these particularized benefits (Arnold 1990, Kingdon 1989).

A fourth condition, which focuses more explicitly on the constituency side of the electoral connection, is that voters must possess the ability to keep legislators accountable; that is, they must be able to evaluate legislators’ performance in office and punish or reward them accordingly. In addition, Mayhew (1974, pp. 28–38) suggests that a representative’s particular electoral circumstances should influence his or her legislative behavior. Electorally vulnerable or marginal legislators, for example, should be less likely to support legislation that is politically unpopular. At the same time, we should observe higher rates of retirement among those legislators voting for unpopular legislative initiatives and lower rates of reelection among those who support such policies. Indeed, these expectations are borne out in studies examining the electoral consequences of position taking and roll-call voting during the contemporary era, in which legislators are penalized for extreme behavior relative to the constituency they represent (Bovitz & Carson

2006, Canes-Wrone et al. 2002, Carson et al. 2010, Jacobson 1993, Tessin & Clinton 2007).

We hold that these four conditions must be fulfilled in order for an electoral connection, along the lines that Mayhew (1974) first elaborated, to operate. We examine these conditions in detail in the next four sections, identifying when each was satisfied in a strict sense through an extensive review of the literature on congressional behavior and elections. We also allow for flexibility in our assessment of each condition, to determine if it operated differently than what we have come to expect in the modern era. In doing so, we consider whether a weaker or less formalized electoral connection may have existed even further back in time.

AMBITION

Political ambition is the first and perhaps most fundamental component of the electoral connection. The desire to achieve reelection (and to maintain a career in Congress, more generally) is the basic building block of Mayhew's thesis; reelection desire follows directly from an assumption about members' political ambition. Carving out a congressional career, and possibly rising in the chamber's leadership structure, is sufficiently attractive to ambitious members that they are willing to bear a variety of costs (campaign costs, opportunity costs of alternative employment, etc.) to make it happen.

How long have members of Congress been politically ambitious? Or perhaps more in keeping with Mayhew's thesis, how long have legislators valued a career in Congress and thus actively sought reelection? A survey of the literature reveals that these are two distinct questions with two distinct answers.

We consider the issue of careerism first. There is general agreement among legislative scholars, using different measures such as the average number of terms served (Polsby 1968), the percentage of senior members (Price 1971), the percentage of incumbents replaced (Fiorina et al. 1975), and the percentage of incumbents running in the general election (Brady et al. 1999), as to when legislators sought to establish

roots in Congress and make it the basis of their careers. The findings are summarized by Brady et al. (1999, p. 490):

The literature generally dates the rise in careerism as beginning in the 1890–1910 period. . . . After 1900, the number of freshman House members sharply declined and the average years of incumbent service grew dramatically. . . . [B]y 1920 the House had been transformed from a body of amateur members to a modern legislature of professional politicians with established careers in Washington.

The 1890–1910 era seems to have been a significant moment in the rise of congressional careerism—thanks in part to a variety of changes both endogenous (the growing importance of seniority) and exogenous (declining party competition along with various electoral reforms) to Congress. But there is also evidence that a careerist trend had begun before then. Kernell (1977, p. 671), for example, contends that House membership began stabilizing as early as 1860, and that there was a “near linear growth of congressional careerism” from the Civil War through the 1920s. Moreover, he suggests that congressional careerism may extend back even earlier, as antebellum southern politicians likely saw the benefit of “extended political service in protecting [their] ‘peculiar institution’” (p. 676).

There are difficulties, however, in ascribing “desire for a congressional career” to each of these presumptive measures of careerism. This is because the measures conflate nomination and election—which means members counted as “careerists” or “career-seeking” were those who sought reelection *and* previously won renomination. Some incumbents likely sought reelection, and desired a career in Congress, but were denied renomination. Unfortunately, data on nineteenth-century nomination politics are quite poor, making further refinement difficult. Moreover, incumbents could not seek nominations directly during the nineteenth century, as nominations were determined by party conventions and were also sometimes subject to

informal term limits (i.e., rotation). These encumbrances on the discretion of incumbents are discussed in the next section. The larger point here is simply that the typical measures of congressional careerism are limited in what they can tell us about the rates at which incumbents in either the House or Senate desired reelection and a career in Congress more generally.

A broader question is: Were nineteenth-century representatives ambitious?¹ If ambition is defined more broadly than “desiring a career in Congress” or “single-minded reelection seeking,” then Mayhew’s formulation is potentially applicable during an era of high turnover in Congress. For instance, Stewart (1989, pp. 9–10) argues:

[T]he extent of the nineteenth-century congressional revolving door has frequently been overinterpreted. The high turnover rates mask the extent to which late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century MCs [Members of Congress] were professional politicians, but politicians with a higher priority on local careers than on national ones. Thus, the ‘election pursuit’ hypothesis that drives current congressional research in this tradition can be applied to past congressional behavior if the conceptualization of election pursuit is made more general, allowing for a broader notion of what MCs wanted to do with their future careers.

Based on Stewart’s argument, careerism in the nineteenth century may be better conceived as “political careerism” than “congressional careerism.” Ambitious office seekers in the nineteenth century typically pursued a leapfrog strategy in building their political careers, with a seat in Congress constituting just one stop along the way. Often members moved from a local (state) position to Congress and

then back again, and governorships, mayoralities, and judgeships were common employment destinations after serving in Congress (Kernell 1977, p. 691). Access to these latter positions often hinged on members’ congressional performance, as party leaders back home kept a close eye on Washington politics (Stewart 1989, pp. 57–58).²

Elsewhere, Stewart (2001, pp. 138–39) explores the ambition and back-and-forth career pattern of pre-twentieth-century legislators. Looking at two early Congresses, the first (1789–1791) and 47th (1881–1883), he finds that 95.4% and 80.7% of freshman House members, respectively, had previous (local) political experience. Moreover, many of those freshmen did not end their political careers in Congress, as 53.8% and 44.3%, respectively, held another political position after serving in the House. Examining all Congresses through the turn of the twentieth century—the first (1789–1791) through 56th (1899–1901)—we uncover results consistent with Stewart’s argument. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, a majority of freshman House members throughout the period were politically experienced, with a per-Congress average of 81.6% having held a prior political position. The findings on subsequent political experience are also interesting and hint at the rise of congressional careerism. Between the first and 24th Congresses (1789–1837), 50.3% of House freshmen went on to hold another political position; this drops to 45.1% between the 25th and 41st Congresses (1837–1871) and 35.2% between the 42nd and 56th Congresses (1871–1901). These data suggest that a small move toward House careerism

¹The earliest discussion of ambition in this context involves *eighteenth*-century legislators. According to James Madison in *Federalist* 51 and 53 (Rossiter 1961), legislators have always been ambitious, which is why frequent elections to the U.S. House were necessary.

²Even during the period of strong party bosses and machine politics in the nineteenth century, there is almost no systematic evidence suggesting that member ambition was tempered by the party-centered nature of the electoral process. The fact that individual candidates had to seek out the approval of the party organization to earn a position in Congress did not mean that they failed to value that position once elected. Indeed, there is growing evidence that nineteenth-century political parties desired strong candidates on the ticket as much as the candidates needed the parties to facilitate their careers in Congress (see, e.g., Carson et al. 2007).

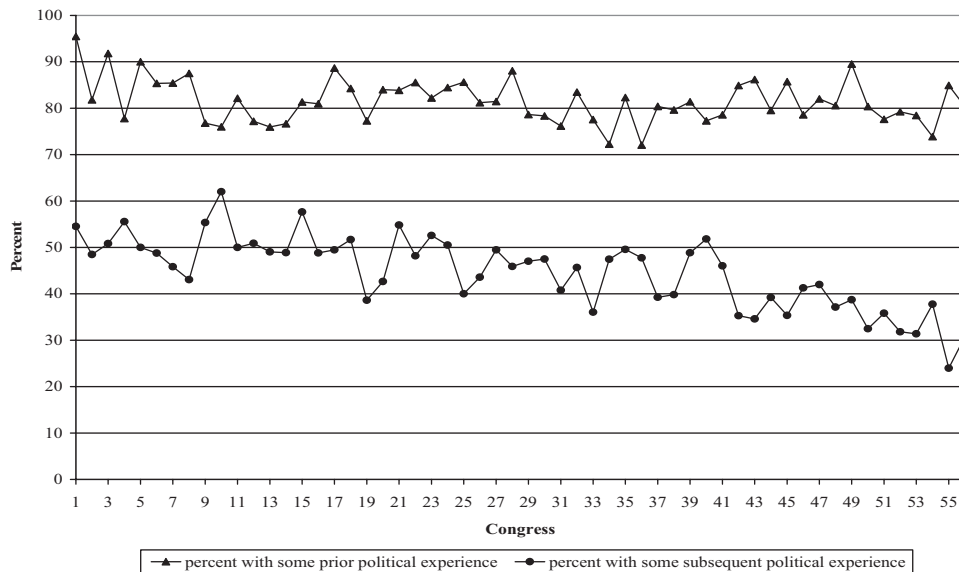


Figure 1

Percent of freshman House members with prior/subsequent political experience, first (1789–1791) through 56th (1899–1901) Congresses. Source: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, and Carroll McKibbin. *Roster of United States Congressional Officeholders and Biographical Characteristics of Members of the United States Congress, 1789–1996: Merged Data*, 10th ICPSR ed. Computer file produced and distributed by Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1997.

occurred during the early part of the Second Party System, and a considerably larger move began during Reconstruction.

Overall, these results indicate that a clear “political class” existed in the nineteenth century; although ambitious politicians may not have been congressional careerists in the modern sense, they did establish political life as their vocation. The notion that nineteenth-century politics was populated by a collection of “Mr. Smiths,” who did their brief tour of duty in Washington amid an otherwise ordinary career wholly outside of politics, is simply incorrect.

Before moving on, we briefly entertain a related question: Why was careerism more political than congressional during much of the nineteenth century? This question has never been examined in any detail in the literature, but two potential answers come to mind. First, much of the action in political-economic development prior to the Civil War occurred at the state and local levels—this is where the bulk of the money was and where political decision

making had the greatest effect on public policy (Wallis 2004, Wallis & Weingast 2005). It was only after the Civil War that the federal government expanded appreciably, and large revenue surpluses (brought on by protective tariffs) provided members of Congress with substantial distributive policy-making authority (Kernell 1977). Second, congressional salaries were low throughout the nineteenth century, and several laws that raised them significantly were quickly rescinded (Alston et al. 2006, Bianco et al. 1996). Thus, serving in Congress was not a lucrative venture during much of the nineteenth century, and other political offices, even many at the state level, often paid considerably more.

AUTONOMY

Although ambition may be the most fundamental component of the electoral connection, it must be combined with autonomy to reach the Mayhewian conception. It is not enough that members want to achieve reelection (and

maintain a career in Congress), they must also be in a position to make it happen. They must possess discretion to pursue reelection, should that be their choice, and do it largely on their own terms. And they must be able to craft their own reelection campaigns, based on their knowledge of their geographic units and the political dynamics therein, largely unhindered by external (partisan) requirements. Stated simply, Mayhew's thesis requires that incumbents be able to control their own electoral destinies.

Discretion

The first element of the autonomy component is discretion. Members must be able to pursue reelection on their own accord; the option must be available for them to exercise. This sort of discretion is in fact a fairly recent (modern) development. The choice to run for reelection is tied to the choice to seek party renomination, which is one step removed. Because election viability often depends on running under the banner of one of the two major American parties, renomination is crucial to reelection.

In a strict sense, the ability of a congressional incumbent to seek party renomination *directly* originated with the political-primary movement in the early twentieth century. Primary elections (or "direct primaries") allow candidates to compete actively for a party's nomination by appealing directly to party-identifying citizens in the underlying geographic constituencies.³ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the vast majority of states adopted direct-primary laws, which covered congressional party nominations as well as party nominations for most other state offices (see Ware 2002, p. 123). Thus, for much of the last century, the ability of members to seek reelection has been a two-stage process, with renomination essentially required (except in rare circumstances) as the initial stage of reelection.

³Politicians of the era recognized immediately the effects of direct primary elections on House membership. As House Speaker Champ Clark (1920, p. 220) stated, "The primary election method . . . helps the sitting member retain his seat if he is at all worthy of it."

Prior to the rise of direct primaries, state party conventions determined the nomination process. Party nominees for House seats were chosen in district conventions, with delegates selected from the district's various counties (Reynolds 2006). The convention system was therefore an indirect nomination process, as candidates for office (including incumbents) were left to the mercy of convention delegates who determined party slates. There was little room for the average voter in such a system; voters may have had some input in initial delegate selection (which varied by county), but they had no direct say over the choice of congressional nominees.

In addition to facing an indirect nominating system during the convention era, some nineteenth-century incumbents also had to deal with state-level term limits. This was part of the norm of "rotation," as party leaders worked to distribute offices among the many party faithful. Rotation generally meant that members of Congress were restricted to a finite period of service (often two terms). Because rotation was an informal party rule, data on which states employed rotation, and over what period of time this practice was utilized by state party organizations, are sketchy at best. Despite the well-known case of Abraham Lincoln being restricted to one House term in Illinois, per the Whig Party rule in place at the time, Kernell (1977) argues that rotation was a relatively minor problem because it was not employed widely and thus affected relatively few incumbents. Indeed, he estimates that only 4% of all congressional careers during the 1850s were ended due to rotation, only 3% in the 1870s and 1880s, and just 1% in the 1890s (but see Price 1998 for a critique of Kernell's methodology).

While party conventions served as a potential barrier to ambitious politicians, reelection-minded incumbents and other potential candidates did not behave passively during this era. Rather, they acted rationally and adjusted to the institutional environment. During much of the convention era, active campaigning by candidates was frowned upon—although, as Reynolds (2006, p. 9) notes, "Prospective

nominees and their friends worked quietly behind the scenes.” By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the culture had changed, and candidates behaved much more aggressively, courting convention delegates openly and actively. Reynolds (2006, pp. 10, 72–73) contends that congressional candidates “had learned that it paid to be assertive in promoting one’s availability for party honors” and that “it was expected that persons desirous of a nomination had to spend extra time, money, and energy to win it.” Thus, the “hustling candidate” emerged well in advance of the direct-primary era.

Independence

The second element of the autonomy component is independence. And while it is often held that candidate-centered campaigns emerged in force after World War II, per the Mayhewian thesis, other evidence suggests that the direct primary was the instigator by creating an open nomination process, which resulted in a Darwinian struggle among potential candidates. Election costs rose astronomically, as sizeable pots of money needed to be raised and spent on campaign managers, agents in the field, and political advertising (Reynolds 2006, pp. 190–92). Candidates who had strong financial backing—and who could raise money consistently—were advantaged under the new system. The great sums of money spent in the early years of the direct-primary era led some states to pass laws to restrict various forms of political advertising. Other laws attempted to place dollar limits on campaign expenditures and force disclosure of how funds were being spent (so-called “corrupt practices acts”), while several states went so far as to briefly reemploy a form of the convention system in response to the escalating costs of campaigns.

Of course, money often lubricated the last years of the convention system, as hustling candidates, eager for nominations, distributed funds to lobby convention delegates. As Summers (2004, p. 8) states, “Money [in the late nineteenth century] was everywhere. A campaign could not get along without it.” Indeed,

the financial independence of potential candidates was a major issue even during the height of the convention era. Although party leaders had a strong hand in selecting candidates, it was still very much a candidate-centered process—the viability of potential candidates depended on the degree to which they could independently finance their pursuit of office. According to Reynolds (2006, p. 189), “Politicians salivated at the prospect of nominating a rich man for office who could liberally fund the fall campaign.” With financial independence came general campaign independence, as candidates were given considerable latitude to establish their own campaign messages (within the broad contours of the party platform).

Bolting

One additional aspect of autonomy deserves mention. Although discretion to seek reelection was hampered during the era of nominating conventions, because of the indirect nature of the nomination process, incumbents often had a backdoor option available to them. During much of the nineteenth century, the balloting process was informal; a state-sponsored balloting system was not widely in operation until the 1890s. This meant that the parties themselves were largely responsible for printing and distributing ballots. Thus, if an incumbent failed to receive his party’s nomination, he could “bolt” the party (and the convention’s decision) and run a “splinter campaign” in the general election. All that was required was for him to print and distribute ballots of his own. As Bense (2003, p. 8) argues:

Unlike contemporary politics where a new party would have to circulate petitions, pay filing fees, and meet deadlines months before an election takes place, a party faction could become an effective contender at the polls even if it bolted only hours before the voting started.

Moreover, the lack of ballot rules allowed a splinter candidate to reconfigure the “regular” party slate and insert his own name in place

of the party's chosen nominee (Ware 2002). Doing so required no special skills or talents. As Reynolds (2006, p. 127) explains, "anyone could prepare and distribute 'mixed' or 'irregular' tickets." Thus, if an incumbent was popular enough and controlled enough resources to print ballots and hire workers to distribute them, he could still credibly vie for reelection without the party's official nomination.

RESPONSIVENESS

In addition to being ambitious and autonomous, members of Congress must also be responsive. Responsiveness, the third component of the Mayhewian conception of the electoral incentive, means that incumbents must be able to fulfill the needs and requests of their constituents. As reelection requires constituent ratification, members must be in a position to provide the types of benefits that constituents care about. In the contemporary Congress, Mayhew contends that legislators frequently engage in three types of behaviors in their pursuit of constituent support: advertising, credit claiming, and position taking. Indeed, it is a mixture of these three fundamental activities, Mayhew suggests, that helps to ensure that members of Congress continue to be reelected.

To what extent are these types of reelection-oriented activities actively facilitated by the institutional structure within Congress? According to Mayhew (1974, pp. 81–82):

[T]he organization of Congress meets remarkably well the electoral needs of its members. To put it another way, if a group of planners sat down and tried to design a pair of American national assemblies with the goal of serving members' electoral needs year in and year out, they would be hard pressed to improve on what exists.

What makes this statement particularly interesting is that many of the recognizable congressional institutions—such as the standing committee system and the property rights norm—were in place as far back as the early

nineteenth century (Gamm & Shepsle 1989, Jenkins 1998, Stewart & Canon 2001). Even so, when we discuss the electoral connection in conjunction with these legislative institutions, we often do so in terms of the contemporary Congress. For instance, when focusing on legislators engaging in credit-claiming activities, we often think about how effective they are at funneling pork back home. Or we emphasize how members of Congress take advantage of the media to advertise themselves or their accomplishments to their constituents.

Were nineteenth-century legislators in a position to utilize these types of activities to provide "benefits" to their constituents? Yes, albeit to a somewhat more limited extent than we regularly observe today.

Advertising

As noted above, Reynolds (2006) describes how candidates during much of the nineteenth century were expected to rise above the political fray—as raw political ambition was considered a vice during this era—by not actively soliciting public support for their campaigns. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, this cultural (and behavioral) norm was swept away, as candidates actively adjusted their behavior in an attempt to earn and retain the nomination for office (Reynolds 2006, pp. 62–67). These hustling candidates valued getting their name out to delegates in much the same way that Mayhew claims that congressional incumbents do today. Once they secured a seat in Congress, they could then utilize their legislative accomplishments to persuade voters that they should be reelected.

Evidence for member advertising in the antebellum era also exists. Cooper & Young (1989) argue that changes to the rules of bill introduction in the House, going back to the late 1830s, were made at least in part to generate additional opportunities for members to promote their legislative efforts. Committees had always been privileged in their ability to introduce bills, and members' opportunities to gain the floor for advertising purposes had always

been limited. This created pent-up member demand. And, in fact, the rules changes in 1837–1838 only whetted members’ appetites. By the 1840s, as Alexander (1917, p. 217) states,

members clamored for more time for the introduction of bills. At first bills were not numerous. The modern habit of using them to advertise a member’s activities did not then obsess the legislative mind. . . . But when the fact developed that a bill introduced, though not passed, benefited the member, since it evidenced a disposition to serve his constituents, the House (1860) set apart each alternate Monday for their introduction. . . . This radical change, encouraging members to present bills on all possible subjects, created such a Monday rush that it increased their number nearly twenty-fold in twenty years . . .

Institutional development in the House, thus, followed directly from members’ self interest. Beginning in the 1830s, and continuing over the next few decades, bill introduction changed so as to make it easier for members “to introduce business of interest to their states and localities” (Cooper & Young 1989, p. 98). This argument for constituency-induced member self-interest being the driving force for institutional development in the House is quite consistent with Mayhew’s (1974) elaboration of the electoral connection.

Position Taking

In addition to advertising, members of Congress also find it advantageous to engage in various forms of position taking. As Mayhew (1974, p. 62) reminds us, the “congressman as a position taker is a speaker rather than a doer,” since “the position itself is the political commodity.” In the age of 24-hour cable news and the Internet, incumbents have a far easier time getting their message out today than they did in the past. Nevertheless, the reach of the party press was extensive in the nineteenth century (Pasley 2001, Smith 1977), and events in Congress were covered in great

detail (Kernell 1986, Kernell & Jacobson 1987). These party newspapers thus provided incumbents with an outlet to advocate positions on issues that the public cared about well before the era of mass technological communications.

One interesting case of antebellum position taking has been explored in great detail in the literature—the petition movement against slavery in the 1830s (Jenkins & Stewart 2003, Meinke 2007, Miller 1995). Petitions, or memorials, sent from citizens to their representatives had been a part of the representative–constituency linkage from the government’s founding. In the mid-1830s, the petition movement escalated, as antislavery advocates in the North flooded their representatives with requests that slavery be eliminated. These efforts eventually led to a series of “gag rules” in Congress, wherein petitions regarding slavery would not be read. After years of argument, and mounting pressure in the North, the gag on slavery petitions was repudiated, as many Northern politicians who had previously supported the gag switched their positions, fearing constituent retribution. This fear of taking the “wrong” position on slavery issues later affected speakership elections in the 1840s and 1850s (Jenkins & Stewart 2001).

Another example of position taking involves civil service reform legislation in the 1880s. For years after the Civil War, legislation to reform the civil service system in the United States was pushed, without success. Theriault (2003) argues that a series of events in the early 1880s—the emergence of organizations dedicated to eradicating the spoils system, President Garfield’s assassination in 1881 by a disgruntled office seeker, and the midterm elections of 1882 that resulted in substantial Republican losses—contributed to a shift in public support for civil service reform. Indeed, it was during the lame-duck session following the 1882 midterms that reform legislation was enacted, via the Pendleton Act (1883). In emphasizing the importance of legislative responsiveness on this issue, Theriault (2003, p. 53) maintains that “members of Congress gave up patronage and political assessments, not only because they

were perhaps inefficient avenues to reelection, but because the public demanded reform and the members wanted to be reelected.” Theriault’s argument builds upon the work of Johnson & Libecap (1994), who argue that legislators passed civil service reform as a strategic initiative to facilitate their reelection efforts. With more skilled politicians in the civil service, they argue, legislators could better manage their remaining political appointees. Thus, according to Johnson & Libecap, reelection was a central goal for members of Congress in the 1880s, well before the modern era.

Credit Claiming

The final activity that reelection-seeking incumbents regularly employ is credit claiming. The member’s goal is simple: to accomplish certain objectives on behalf of his or her constituents that will make them supportive in subsequent elections. In the contemporary era, there are many opportunities for credit claiming—such as securing pork-barrel projects, preventing a military base from being closed, and performing intermediary work on behalf of constituents (or “casework”)—many of which stem directly from the committee on which a representative sits. Ultimately, the representative needs to convince constituents that (a) he or she is personally responsible for making something desirable happen and (b) the desired outcome would be significantly less likely to occur if he or she were not currently serving in Congress.

As noted above, much of the recognized institutional structure in Congress that facilitates credit claiming was in place long before the post-World War II era. This, in turn, suggests that incumbents may have found it advantageous to utilize their positions on legislative committees far earlier than is generally accepted to try to achieve benefits for their constituents. Indeed, committee assignments and committee chairs were hotly contested during the antebellum period—probably, at least in part, for credit-claiming purposes. In the postbellum era, committee assignments

and chairmanships formed the glue to hold the party organizations together, as they were doled out to different factions in the party based on members’ particular needs and thereby cemented organizational decisions made in caucus (Jenkins & Stewart 2012).

The late-nineteenth-century congressional agenda created the basis for many credit-claiming opportunities, as particularistic issues gained in importance. In discussing policy responsiveness in Congress during the 1870s, for instance, Thompson (1985, pp. 123, 125) states:

Most legislators tried earnestly to hold up their end of the representational relationship by pledging to work explicitly on behalf of what they perceived to be their constituencies’ policy interests. Speeches, eulogies, memoirs, journalistic accounts, and, for those who kept them, diaries and correspondences all attest to the pervasiveness of such behavior. . . . There is a clear consensus that House members demonstrated awareness of and concern for their constituencies’ needs and tried, whenever possible, to act responsively.

More specifically, rivers-and-harbors legislation emerged in force in the early 1880s, and typically “contained significant appropriations for improvements designed to benefit only particular localities” (Stathis 2002, p. 122). Members of Congress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries frequently claimed credit for their district’s respective piece of the rivers-and-harbors pie (Wilson 1986a,b).⁴ Protective tariffs were perhaps the major political-economic issue in the postbellum Congress, as a variety of raw-materials producers and manufacturers forcefully lobbied their representatives for favorable trade terms. Members were cognizant of such lobbying

⁴Wilson (1986a) notes that members in this era also sought committee assignments that would allow them to craft rivers and harbors legislation in such a way as to insure benefits to their districts; being on the “right” committee would thus provide them with a more credible mechanism to claim credit with their constituents.

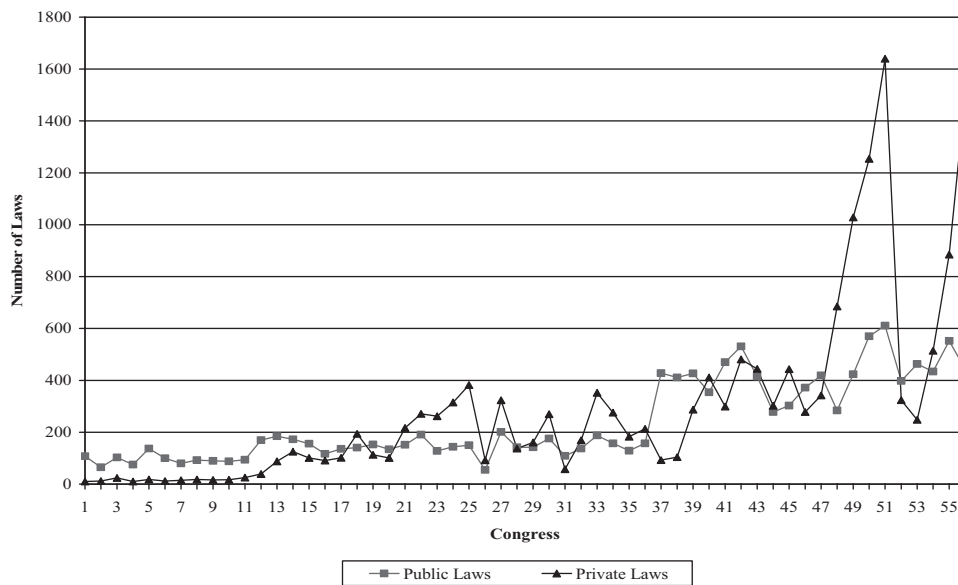


Figure 2

Public and private laws, first (1789–1791) through 56th (1899–1901) Congresses. Source: McIver (2006).

efforts and actively sought to signal that they were being responsive (often with floor speeches and roll-call votes) and to claim credit for specific elements in the tariff schedules (Brady 1973, Brady et al. 2002, Conybeare 1991). Lastly, Civil War pensions, which were often funded by revenue surpluses generated by postbellum protective tariffs, were a major element of policy making. Civil War veterans were a large client group, and legislators worked hard to pass general pension bills as well as meet the individual needs of pensioners (and potential pensioners) in their districts (Finocchiaro 2005, 2006).

Interestingly, the particularistic congressional programs in the post-Civil War era were rooted in the pre-Civil War era. That is, constituent demand, congressional policy making, and credit claiming were components of political life in antebellum America. For example, protective tariffs were as hotly contested prior to the Civil War as they were after, and geographically centered constituent pressure and congressional responsiveness were very much in operation (Irwin 2006, Pincus 1977). Additionally, the template for

Civil War pension legislation could be found in the Revolutionary War pensions of the 1810s and 1830s. The particularistic elements of veterans’ pensions originated then, as members of Congress who represented geographic units with a higher concentration of pension-eligible adults actively sought a greater distribution of benefits (Finocchiaro & Jenkins 2006).⁵

Evidence of credit claiming in the antebellum era can also be found in the number of public and private laws produced. These data, presented in **Figure 2**, show that the number of private laws trailed the number of public laws until the 1830s, when members of Congress recognized opportunities for credit claiming by providing Revolutionary War pensions to particular constituents (and their families) via private bills. This private-pension strategy continued through the late 1850s (as

⁵The creation of postal roads and postal reform more generally was another distributive-policy area that was driven by constituent demand in the antebellum era. Members of Congress were keenly aware of constituent sentiment and endeavored to be responsive, even when that meant bucking the party position. See Baughman (2006, 2007).

Mexican-American War veterans were also targeted). After the Civil War, the number of potential pensioners was enormous, and Congress generally worked to provide for their needs through public acts. By the 1880s, members of Congress once again turned to private bills to provide pensioners and their families with relief—and they did so with gusto, as the number of private bills (and laws) skyrocketed. This massive increase coincided with the trend toward careerism that began in the late nineteenth century. As Cooper & Young (1989, p. 99) state, by the 1880s, “the Civil War made private business in the form of pensions and relief from political disabilities more relevant to [members’ immediate] career interests.”

In seeking evidence of member responsiveness, one need not stop with the nineteenth century. One can find evidence of constituency-based decision making even in the late eighteenth century. For example, the apportionment of congressional seats after the decennial census, which precipitated battles in Congress through the 1940s, emerged as an issue in 1791, as members debated a new House size and ratio of representation (Balinski & Young 2001, Schmeckebier 1941, Zagarrri 1987). Inevitably, different bills were introduced, stipulating different House sizes (105, 112, and 120 representatives), that appeared to favor different regions and economic constituencies. As Balinski & Young (2001, p. 13) note, “The contest over division of seats arose from deep political divisions: the emerging conflict between North and South, between Republican and Federalist, between agricultural and industrial interests.” The stakes were high, and although the 120-seat apportionment bill passed both chambers, it led to the first presidential veto in U.S. history, as President Washington preferred the 105-seat measure. Like apportionment, bankruptcy policy, which was a major issue in Congress during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, also had its roots in the eighteenth century—with the first major U.S. bankruptcy law passed in 1800. Roll-call votes on bankruptcy issues had a distinct constituency basis, which was both regional (North versus

South) and economic (supported by banking and trading interests) in nature (Berglöf & Rosenthal 2007, Poole & Rosenthal 2007).

Why would legislators endeavor to be responsive to constituents in the premodern era if they were not interested in pursuing a career in Congress? The answer may be quite simple: As suggested above, although incumbents were not focused on a career in Congress, they were focused on a career in politics. It makes sense that legislators would want to do things to keep their constituents happy, such as taking favorable public positions on roll-call votes and routinely engaging in credit claiming.⁶ After all, the same constituents whom congressional incumbents represented today might very well be their constituents later, when they ran for a state-level position. Moreover, legislator responsiveness followed from party leaders’ preferences. Party leaders cared about maintaining majority control of Congress, so they wanted to keep districts firmly in the party column, even if the individual placeholder was not a congressional careerist. Therefore, party leaders wanted legislators to satisfy constituents. Since political careers during this era were built largely within party organizations (Aldrich 1995), party leaders could affect legislators’ career prospects by influencing their ability to obtain subsequent state-level positions. Thus, legislators possessed a strong incentive to hew to what party leaders wanted.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The final component of Mayhew’s conception of the electoral incentive is accountability. Members of Congress must be accountable to voters, who evaluate their performance in office and punish (vote to remove) or reward (vote to reelect) them accordingly. Accountability thus requires that voters have the means to evaluate

⁶As Bianco et al. (1996) note: “It is one thing to argue that a congressional career was less attractive or less feasible in an earlier time than it is today, but another to conclude that members of the early Congress were unconcerned about the electoral consequences of their behavior.”

individual incumbents, as well as the general aptitude or capacity to make a choice. Unlike the previous three components, which focus on legislators specifically, this final component focuses on voters within the member's geographic constituency. Voters ultimately decide whether members will achieve their goal of reelection.

Voters were first provided with the means to evaluate individual members of Congress in the late nineteenth century, with the advent of the Australian ballot. As noted above, an official balloting system did not exist in the United States throughout most of the nineteenth century; instead, ballots were printed and distributed largely by the parties themselves, and provided a list of the party's (and *only* the party's) candidates for all available offices (Keyssar 2000). Beginning in the late 1880s and stretching into the 1910s, states took over the balloting process, and the unofficial party ballot was replaced by an official government ballot (for a list of adoption dates by state, see Albright 1942, Engstrom & Kernell 2005). The new state-generated ballot—known as the Australian ballot because it was first instituted in Australia—listed all candidates for all offices, from which the voters could pick and choose by both candidate and office. The Australian ballot made ticket splitting more straightforward, and thus made it much easier for voters to punish or reward candidates individually (Katz & Sala 1996). The ballot thus firmed up the agency relationship by increasing accountability; members of Congress now had a greater incentive to be responsive to voters' needs.

Before the Australian ballot, the agency relationship was considerably softer, as the structure of the party ballot constrained voters' ability to hold individual incumbents accountable. The parties constructed their ballots to promote straight-ticket voting. While it was possible for voters to split their tickets and punish or reward individual candidates, it required manual effort. For example, voters could scratch out a candidate's name and write in another name; they could accept small strips of paper (called "pasters") with unofficial candidates' names written in, which were often hawked at

voting places, and affix them over the names that were on the ballot; or they could create their own ballot at home and bring it to the polling place (Bensel 2004, Reynolds 2006, Summers 2004, Ware 2002).

There were also dangers associated with *not* voting a straight party ticket in the party-ballot era. Voting was not secret, and party henchmen were positioned at the polling places, ever watchful of how voters behaved (Bensel 2004). In addition, party ballots were often color coded, giving the party henchman a clear cue of voters' intentions. Pressure or outright violence could be directed toward those who bucked straight party voting. Nevertheless, as Reynolds (2006, p. 128) notes, "Anecdotal evidence of rampant ticket splitting [during the party-ballot era] is abundant. It also finds ample support in the election data." He surveys two Colorado precincts in 1888 and 1904, and finds that 29.6% and 37.4% of ballots, respectively, were of the split-ticket variety (130–31). Bensel (2004, p. 32) looks at an Ohio county in 1868 and uncovers more moderate results: 17% of ballots cast were split tickets. Reynolds & McCormick (1986) also examine ten counties in New York and New Jersey every two years from 1880 through 1910 and find that the incidence of split-ticket voting was as high as 25% in certain parts of the states. In short, although ticket splitting clearly became easier during the Australian-ballot era, voters had possessed and exercised the ability to reward or punish candidates during the party-ballot era.

Did voters possess the capacity to punish or reward individual incumbents during the nineteenth century? This was well before the era of mass communications—radio and television were still decades away—and many studies hold that this period was characterized by very strong citizen attachments to party (Silbey 1985, 1991), with any significant election-to-election deviations (when they occurred) resulting from voters punishing the party in power across the board for negative economic conditions (Holt 1992). Still, the availability of political news was substantial—as noted above, newspapers were plentiful throughout the country, and

national events (principally actions taken by the President and Congress) made up the lion's share of newspapers' political coverage (see Kernell 1986, Kernell & Jacobson 1987). And news—especially news that involved a member of Congress—was a hot commodity. As Jenkins & Stewart (2012, Ch. 2) write: “In an era devoid of mass communication and [with] few diversions, word from Washington about the people's business was eagerly awaited, distributed hand-to-hand, and discussed among neighbors just like episodes of *American Idol* are today.” The available evidence suggests that citizens were sufficiently engaged politically to keep track of their elected representatives.

Research on the nineteenth-century Congress supports the accountability component of the electoral connection. Three examples stand out. Bianco et al. (1996) examine the Compensation Act of 1816, which retroactively increased congressional pay by as much as 100%, and find that (a) members who were more electorally vulnerable were less likely to support the legislative compensation plan and (b) members who chose to support the plan were less likely to seek reelection, due to the apparent electoral risks of such action. Moreover, they note that the congressional pay raise was sufficiently salient for voters to become informed about it, even during this era of limited media, and thus made it easier to hold legislators accountable for their support of the controversial legislation. In general, Bianco et al. (1996, p. 147) find that

voters in the 1816 elections did not indiscriminately punish incumbents . . . nor did voters focus their anger on the party in power. Rather it appears that as far as the Compensation Act is concerned, incumbents were held accountable for their individual behavior, much as in the modern era.

As a result, they conclude that “the politics of the modern and early Congresses are [not] as different as the conventional wisdom suggests” (p. 147).

In a similar vein, Carson et al. (2001) examine the congressional elections of 1862–1863, which took place during the Civil War, to determine the extent to which the electorate's dissatisfaction with the Republican-organized war effort led to a systematic backlash against Republican House candidates. They find that, much as in modern elections, both national forces (i.e., the course of the war) and district-specific conditions (i.e., entry of quality challengers against marginal incumbents, district-level war casualties, and the timing of races) affected incumbents' electoral fortunes. More generally, their findings “confirm the importance of district-specific effects on electoral outcomes in the nineteenth century” (p. 894).

Finally, Carson & Engstrom (2005) examine the electoral aftershocks of the disputed presidential election of 1824. The election was divisive, as no candidate received a popular-vote majority; thus, it had to be decided in the House of Representatives. This made the House contest extremely high profile, and citizens throughout the nation eagerly awaited the outcome. Carson & Engstrom find that legislators who (a) voted for John Quincy Adams (the eventual winner) in the House contest and (b) represented districts that supported Andrew Jackson in the popular election were targeted for ouster and suffered a substantial vote loss in the subsequent midterm election. They also find that the entry of a quality challenger had a sizeable impact on the fortunes of incumbents. These results, they contend, “serve to confirm that representatives could be held accountable for their behavior in office during the antebellum era” (p. 746).

Overall, then, there is evidence that incumbents could be held accountable in earlier eras. What is lacking, however, is evidence from the premodern era that is directly comparable to evidence from the modern era. The accounts mentioned here deal with isolated events of an exceptional nature. Without more systematically gathered evidence to indicate that accountability was present on more “ordinary” votes in Congress, it is difficult to fully assess the extent to which this component of the electoral

connection was present generally across time. Recently, Baughman (2007) has taken a step in this direction in his analysis of basic distributive politics in the early nineteenth century—the establishment of postal routes during the 1810s and 1820s—finding that voters were able to hold House members accountable on more routine matters of politics. Additional work in this vein is essential for understanding the nature of the accountability link across time.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Since the publication of Mayhew's (1974) seminal work on Congress and the electoral connection, conventional wisdom has held that his argument about viewing legislators as "single-minded seekers of reelection" really only applies to the contemporary era, specifically, the post-World War II era. In many respects, this has a certain appeal. The contemporary era is characterized by powerful committee chairs clearly advantaged by the seniority system in Congress, allowing them to wield tremendous influence in the policy-making process. Political parties during this era are noticeably weaker than in the past, which has led to greater independence and self-sufficiency on the part of individual candidates running for office. It is during the post-World War II era that legislators regularly utilized the types of activities—advertising, credit claiming, and position taking—that Mayhew outlines in his book. This period also witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of recorded roll-call votes, forcing legislators to go on the record more often, increasing the odds that their positions could become costly in the next election.

The preceding discussion notwithstanding, a review of the literature on congressional behavior and elections yields ample evidence that the electoral connection, as outlined by Mayhew, traces back earlier in time. In specifying the individual, necessary conditions for a Mayhewian electoral connection—ambition, autonomy, responsiveness, and accountability—we find that all were present in a strict sense as early as the Progressive

Era (1890–1920). In particular, congressional careerism (and strong reelection ambition) emerged around 1890–1910; members' autonomy solidified with the rise of direct primaries between 1900 and 1920; and voters' ability to keep individual members accountable was consolidated with the Australian ballot reforms between 1890 and 1910.⁷ Thus, it would seem that the electoral connection, rather than being a development of the post-World War II era, dates back roughly to the turn of the twentieth century.

There is also evidence that a weaker, or less formalized, version of an electoral connection was present even before the Progressive Era. For example, legislators have always been politically ambitious—they simply pursued political careers (specifically, careers within their party) rather than congressional careers during much of the nineteenth century. As a result of their general political ambition, incumbents actively sought to be responsive to constituents' needs and demands. This was necessary because when members of Congress moved on to seek state-level electoral positions, they would want (*a*) the votes of their former congressional district constituents and (*b*) the support of their party's leaders. Political ambition thus bred responsiveness throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The emergence of institutional structures—party leadership positions, the standing committee system, the property rights norm—as far back as the early nineteenth century suggests that members of Congress also valued

⁷No formal institutional change in this period affected member responsiveness (in the same way that changes altered the other three Mayhewian conditions). Nevertheless, there is evidence that responsiveness sharpened in the late nineteenth century. As noted, member advertising ramped up, and opportunities for member credit claiming (via more pork-barrel legislation, as well as more private legislation) increased. In addition, although some argue that responsiveness in the modern era has increased due to the rise of public polling—the claim being that members of Congress better understand constituent demands thanks to poll data—Karol (2007) examines Literary Digest Interest Polls back to the 1910s and concludes that the rise of scientific surveys did not lead to an increase in responsiveness.

responsiveness to constituents well before the modern era. That incumbents were working to meet the needs of former Revolutionary War veterans as early as the 1810s, for example, indicates that legislators recognized the underlying importance of the constituency–representative linkage (Finocchiaro & Jenkins 2006). The continued emphasis on credit-claiming behavior over the next two centuries further illustrates the importance of an electoral connection across much of congressional history. Once incentives for legislators to pursue policy goals or chamber influence are established, then reelection becomes extremely important. Undeniably, the most powerful and influential members of Congress over time tend to be those with the greatest levels of chamber or committee seniority, which has both direct and indirect implications for the emergence and growth of careerism in Congress.

There is also evidence that member autonomy and accountability existed even during the party-convention and party-ballot eras. If incumbents wanted to run for a congressional office, they were not completely constrained by the party-controlled nomination system. Even if they did not receive the party nomination in convention, they could run an independent (or splinter) campaign by printing and distributing their own ballots. Nor did voters need the Australian ballot to keep legislators accountable. Even during the party-ballot era, voters could split their tickets—this required more effort, and it incurred the risk of upsetting party henchman watching the polls, but it was always an available option. Thus, legislators had to be concerned about being voted out of office, should they not be sufficiently responsive to the demands of their constituents; they could not rely on the anti-split-ticket design of the party ballot to insulate them against voter retribution.

Among the numerous potential implications of the preceding discussion, one stands out

in particular. As more systematic evidence is uncovered suggesting that an electoral connection has been present across congressional history, this may lead scholars to revisit our understanding of the institutional development of Congress. Indeed, this could help explain why specific congressional institutions were adopted at certain points in time: They may have been created with the express purpose of enhancing or “firming up” the existing constituency–representative linkage in Congress. That is, the electoral incentive may have always been present, but the adoption of institutions or institutional reforms such as standing committees, the Australian ballot, and the direct primary served to augment the linkages already in place.

In this review, we have sought to better understand how an electoral incentive might have manifested itself in Congress well before the mid-twentieth century. Although some evidence has been marshaled to suggest an inherent temporal fluidity in the electoral linkage, several questions need to be addressed more systematically in future work in order to determine how (and how much) the electoral connection may have changed over time. For instance, why was careerism more political than congressional during much of the nineteenth century? To what extent was the emerging careerism at the end of the nineteenth century tied to issues such as congressional compensation? When, and under what conditions, did legislators begin utilizing their committee assignments to engage in credit claiming? When did the candidate-centered electoral system first emerge in Congress? How frequently were members of Congress punished for their expressed positions on roll-call votes? We believe that answering these questions will offer valuable, new insights into how the institution of Congress has responded to internal and external changes since the founding of our federal system.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A previous version of this paper was presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL. We thank Bill Bianco, Margaret Levi, Nolan McCarty, and Jason Roberts for helpful comments and suggestions.

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