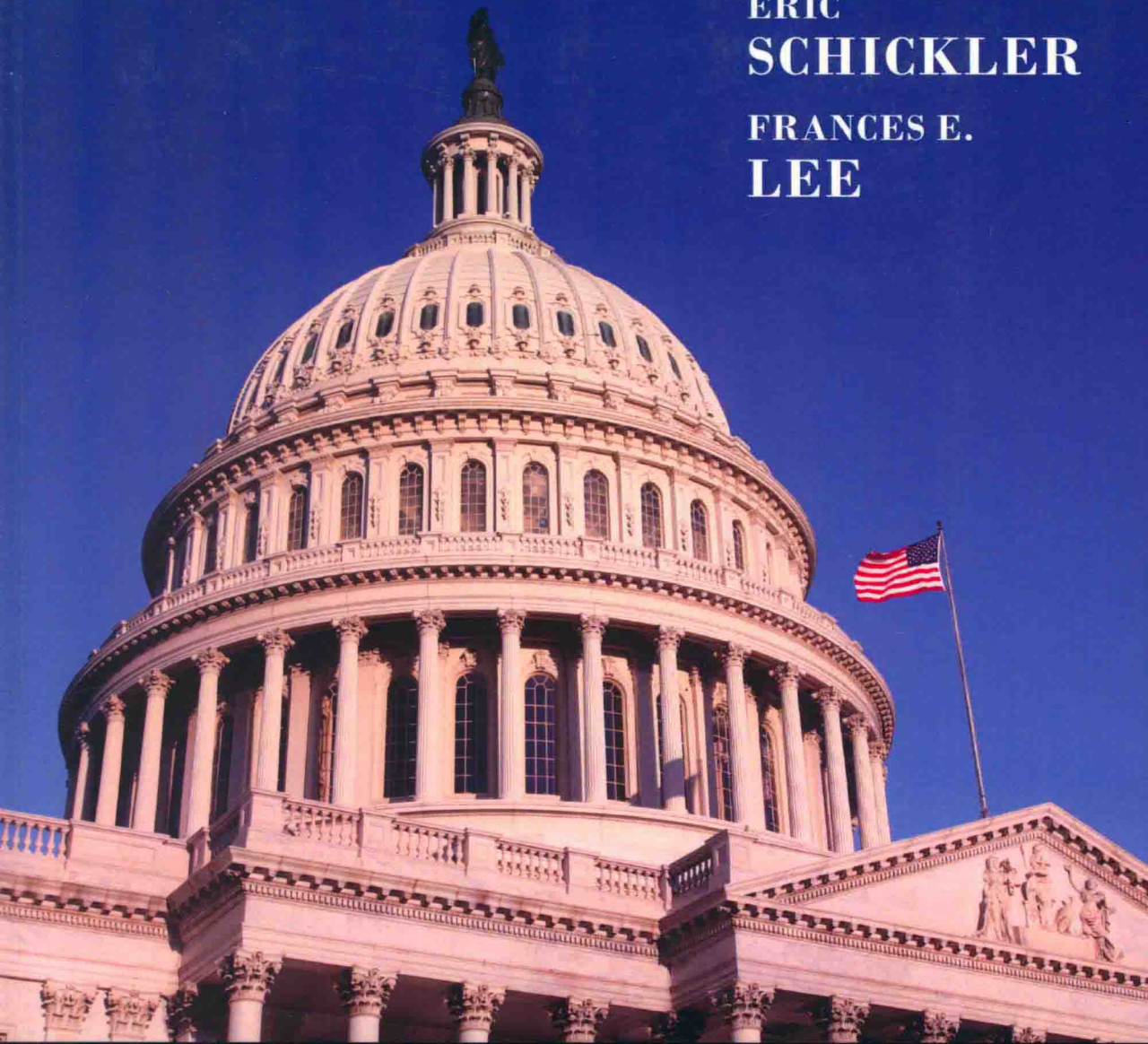


EDITED BY

ERIC
SCHICKLER

FRANCES E.
LEE



≡ The Oxford Handbook of
**THE AMERICAN
CONGRESS**

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

THE AMERICAN
CONGRESS

Edited by

ERIC SCHICKLER

and

FRANCES E. LEE



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THE
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AMERICAN
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The Oxford Handbooks of American Politics is a set of reference books offering authoritative and engaging critical overviews of the state of scholarship on American politics.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

ERIC SCHICKLER

FRANCES E. LEE

No legislature in the world has a greater influence over its nation's public affairs than the U.S. Congress. This remains true, despite a weakening of legislatures relative to executives both in the U.S. and around the world. Article I of the Constitution places Congress at the center of American government, giving it chief responsibility for lawmaking and designing it as the most representative branch of the national government. Over time, the Congress may not have turned out to be the increasingly dominant "impetuous vortex" that James Madison described in *Federalist* 48, but it continues to stand as an autonomous and highly consequential institution in American politics. Made up of representatives and senators whose political fortunes are to a considerable extent separate from both presidents and political parties, Congress is a site of independent legislative entrepreneurship, confrontation with presidents, investigation of public concerns, deliberation on policy and administration, and from time to time, decisive action.

The Congress's centrality in the U.S. system of government has placed research on Congress at the heart of scholarship on American politics. Since the emergence of political science as an academic discipline in the late nineteenth century, generations of American government scholars working in a wide range of methodological traditions have sought to understand Congress, both as a lawmaking body and as a representative institution.

The purpose of this volume is to take stock of this impressive, extensive, and diverse literature, identifying areas of accomplishment and promising directions for future work. We have commissioned thirty-seven chapters by leading scholars in the field. Each chapter critically engages the scholarship on a particular aspect of congressional politics. Beyond simply bringing readers up to speed on the current

state of the literature, the chapters offer critical analysis of how each area of inquiry has progressed—or failed to progress—in recent decades. The chapters identify the major questions posed by each line of research and assess the answers that have been offered. The goal is not simply to tell us where we have been as a field, but to set an agenda for research on Congress for the next decade.

“Congress” means “coming together.” In that sense, this volume offers a congress of its own. Like legislative assemblies, it capitalizes on division of labor and diversity of voice. It brings together accomplished scholars writing in areas of expertise able to provide authoritative treatment of key concerns. But it also benefits from multiplicity of perspective, representing scholars working within different methodological traditions. The book also seeks to achieve a balance between the enduring and the timely. In addition to broad-ranging chapters on basic questions, it also offers chapters focused on narrower topics of special contemporary importance, including partisan polarization; supermajority procedures in the U.S. Senate; and congressional war powers.

ORGANIZATION

Chapters two to six of this volume examine different approaches to the study of Congress. While most scholars employ a combination of approaches, we believe that it is crucial to assess the distinctive contributions, strengths, and weaknesses of each of the major methodological traditions. Arguably the two most prominent approaches have been behavioral studies and formal models. Indeed, one could well argue that congressional scholarship has been a key site for both the behavioral “revolution” and the rise of rational choice. The chapters by Bruce I. Oppenheimer (“Behavioral Approaches to the Study of Congress”) and by Craig Volden and Alan E. Wiseman (“Formal Approaches to the Study of Congress”) consider behavioral and formal analyses of Congress, with particular attention both to what has been learned from studies in these traditions and to how such studies can be advanced going forward. Both formal and behavioral studies frequently rely upon measures of legislators’ preferences. The chapter by Nolan McCarty assesses the vast literature on estimating these preferences. McCarty’s chapter identifies the key assumptions made in constructing measures of member ideal points and assesses the uses (and abuses) of these measures in scholarly work. While behavioral and formal approaches have been especially prominent in recent decades, interviews and direct observation have also figured prominently as approaches to the study of Congress. Ross K. Baker’s chapter surveys the many challenges involved in observational research, while also testifying to its unique value and continued utility. While observational approaches have become less common in recent years, there has been a revival of historical work on Congress since the 1980s. Ira Katznelson’s chapter traces the promise inherent in this historical

turn and what he sees as missed opportunities—thus far—in linking the study of congressional history to broader themes in American political development.

The “electoral connection” rests at the foundation of Congress’s place in the American political system. We commissioned four chapters that consider aspects of congressional elections. Jamie L. Carson and Jason M. Roberts review the literature on House and Senate elections, covering such issues as incumbency advantage, candidate emergence, and partisan tides in election outcomes. While the literature on congressional campaigns has been slower to develop than that on election outcomes and incumbency, Tracy Sulkin’s chapter demonstrates that considerable progress has been made in recent years on such topics as how candidates choose positions and issues in campaigns, the type and quality of information provided to voters, and the relationship between campaigning and governing. We also include chapters examining what is known about the processes and effects of two key aspects of the electoral system: Michael P. McDonald offers a careful look at basic and cutting-edge issues in congressional redistricting, and Robin Kolodny navigates the difficult waters of campaign finance.

A departure in this volume from past efforts to take stock of the Congress literature is an extended examination of “representation and responsiveness.” More specifically, we commissioned a series of chapters designed to tap into the diverse meanings of representation. These include *descriptive representation*: Michele L. Swers and Stella M. Rouse examine the extent to which Congress “looks like America” and what this means for congressional politics and policymaking. A chapter on *bicameral representation* examines the effects of representing two different types of constituencies in two different chambers. Stephen Ansolabehere and Philip Edward Jones take stock of *dyadic representation*: they examine the strong connections—ties forged in both policy agreement and personal relationships—that link individual lawmakers to their constituencies. We include a chapter on *allocative representation*, because constituents consider their members’ ability to bring home a fair share of government largesse an important aspect of representation, albeit one perennially decried by presidents and the nation’s editorial pages. Diana Evans synthesizes the extensive literature on pork barrel politics in Congress, examining what scholars have learned about who gets what, why, and with what effects on legislative coalitions and electoral outcomes. David W. Brady focuses on *collective representation*, the aggregate responsiveness of Congress to national public opinion. Finally, John D. Griffin traces the factors that drive the *public’s evaluations of Congress*, highlighting the extent to which public dissatisfaction with Congress stems from sources beyond discontent with the policies it enacts.

A crucial question is how the 535 members of Congress organize themselves and their institution once they arrive in Washington. Part V brings together six chapters on congressional institutions and procedures. Political parties and committees have long been the two cornerstones of congressional organization; the chapters by Randall W. Strahan and C. Lawrence Evans review the extensive bodies of work that have shaped our understanding of these core features. We also include more specialized chapters on important features of legislative organization. Gregory J. Wawro takes on

one of the most publicly salient—and politically important—recent developments: the increased frequency of obstruction in the Senate and the development of what has been called the “supermajority Senate,” in which sixty votes are required to approve most major policy initiatives. Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins provide a synthetic account of a core problem faced by any legislature: how to allocate plenary time, given the shortage of time relative to proposals that could potentially command support. They place the U.S. Congress in a comparative perspective, while underscoring important House–Senate differences. A recurrent theme in legislative studies has been efforts to reform the way Congress operates. E. Scott Adler’s chapter reviews the scholarship on congressional reform drives and calls for scholars to apply their empirical and theoretical insights to the complex business of evaluating and recommending legislative reforms. Part V on congressional organization concludes with John B. Gilmour’s chapter on the budget process, a subject that has been a particular focus of reformers over the years—and one that has come to occupy an increasing share of Congress’s attention.

The main reason to care about congressional organization is that it shapes the way Congress makes policy, and, at least potentially, policy outcomes themselves. Six chapters focus on important facets of politics and policymaking. The dramatic increase in party polarization since the 1980s has marked a major transformation in congressional politics, with consequences reverberating throughout the political system. Brian F. Schaffner reviews the growing literature on the return of high levels of party polarization to Capitol Hill. Paul J. Quirk and William Bendix examine the processes, quality, and effectiveness of congressional deliberation. Sean Theriault, Patrick Hickey, and Abby Blass turn to how members make their most public decisions as they cast roll-call votes. Beth L. Leech synthesizes the literature on lobbying, highlighting how research regularly calls into question conventional wisdom on lobbyists’ influence. John D. Wilkerson and Barry Pump focus on legislative entrepreneurship and coalition-building. A major question underlying each of these chapters is how the various features of the policymaking process impact Congress’s ability to fulfill its lawmaking responsibilities. Sarah Binder’s chapter, which concludes this part, tackles the “macro” question of explaining legislative productivity and gridlock.

Dramatic changes in congressional politics and policymaking in recent decades have coincided with renewed attention to the development of congressional institutions. We commissioned chapters on the development of three basic institutions: elections, party leadership, and the committee system. Wendy J. Schiller sheds light on how the politics and processes of congressional elections evolved over time and lays down an ambitious research agenda for extending scholarship in this area. Jeffery A. Jenkins sets in historical context the relatively powerful, institutionalized party leadership of the contemporary era, tracing what is known and still needs to be uncovered about its evolution over time. One of the central questions in historical work on Congress has been how the House came to adopt a system of majority rule that greatly limits the minority’s ability to obstruct business, while the Senate grants very substantial protections to the minority. Douglas Dion’s chapter analyzes the key