

where Downsian logic really applies is in the election of individuals to executive posts—presidents, governors, and big city mayors. To choose among candidates for the presidency or the New York City mayoralty is to choose among “executive teams”—candidates with their retinues of future high administrators, financial supporters, ghost-writers, pollsters, student ideologues, journalistic flacks, hangers-on, occasionally burglars and spies. In executive elections the candidates are highly visible; they bid for favor in Downsian fashion; they substantially control government (or appear to) and can be charged with its accomplishments and derelictions (President Nixon for inflation, Mayor Lindsay for crime); elections are typically close (now even in most old machine cities); voters can traffic in “expected differentials” (between executive candidates rather than parties). When the late V. O. Key, Jr., wrote *The Responsible Electorate*,³² a book in the Downsian spirit, he had the empirical good sense to focus on competition between incumbent and prospective presidential administrations rather than more broadly on competition between parties. Indeed, it can be argued that American representative assemblies have declined in power in the twentieth

members regardless of party. Alvin D. Sokolow and Richard W. Brandsma, “Partisanship and Seniority in Legislative Committee Assignments: California after Reapportionment,” *24 Western Political Quarterly* 741–47 (1971).

32. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966.

century (especially at the city council level) and executives have risen chiefly because it is the executives who offer electorates something like Downsian accountability.³³

But at the congressional level the teammanship model breaks down. To hark back to the discussion of Britain, the specified resource and incentive arrangements conducive to party unity among M.P.'s are absent in the congressional environment: First, the way in which congressional candidates win party nominations is not, to say the least, one that fosters party cohesion in Congress. For one thing, 435 House members and 98 senators (all but the Indiana pair) are now nominated by direct primary (or can be, in the few states with challenge primaries) rather than by caucus or convention. There is no reason to expect large primary electorates to honor party loyalty. (An introduction of the direct primary system in Britain might in itself destroy party cohesion in the Commons.) For another, even where party organizations are still strong enough to control congressional primaries,³⁴ the parties are locally rather than

33. There is Huntington's point that sweeping turnover of a Jacksonian sort now occurs in national politics only at the top executive level. Samuel P. Huntington, “Congressional Responses to the Twentieth Century,” ch. 1 in David B. Truman (ed.), *The Congress and America's Future* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 17.

34. In Chicago, for example. See Leo M. Snowiss, “Congres-

nationally oriented; local party unity is vital to them, national party unity is not. Apparently it never has been.³⁵

Second, unlike the M.P. the typical American congressman has to mobilize his own resources initially to win a nomination and then to win election and reelection. He builds his own electoral coalition and sustains it. He raises and spends a great deal of money in doing so. He has at his command an elaborate set of electoral resources that the Congress bestows upon all its members. There will be more on these points later. The important point here is that a congressman can—indeed must—build a power base that is substantially independent of party.³⁶ In the words of a House member quoted by Clapp, "If we depended on

sional Recruitment and Representation," 60 *American Political Science Review* 627-39 (1966).

35. On the fluid behavior of machine congressmen back when there were a good many more of them, see Moisei Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, vol. II, *The United States* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 286-89. Tamm many Democrats broke party ranks to save Speaker Joseph G. Cannon from Insurgent and Democratic attack in the Sixtieth Congress, a year before his downfall. See Blair Bolles, *Tyrant from Illinois* (New York: Norton, 1951), p. 181.

36. See Charles L. Clapp, *The Congressman: His Work as He Sees It* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1963), pp. 30-31; Robert J. Huckshorn and Robert C. Spencer, *The Politics of Defeat* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971), pp. vii, 71-72; David A. Leuthold, *Electioneering in a Democracy* (New York: Wiley, 1968), passim.

the party organization to get elected, none of us would be here."³⁷

Third, Congress does not have to sustain a cabinet and hence does not engage the ambitions of its members in cabinet formation in such a fashion as to induce party cohesion. It would be wrong to posit a general one-to-one relation here between party cohesion and cabinet sustenance. On the one hand, there is nothing preventing congressmen from building disciplined congressional parties anyway if they wanted to do so. On the other hand, as the records of the Third and Fourth French republics show, cabinet regimes can be anchored in relatively incohesive parties. Yet, to pose the proposition in statistical rather than deterministic form, the need for an assembly to sustain a cabinet probably raises the likelihood that it will spawn disciplined parties.³⁸

The fact is that no theoretical treatment of the United States Congress that posits parties as analytic units will go very far. So we are left with individual congressmen, with 535 men and women rather than two parties, as units to be examined in the discussion to come. The style of argument will be somewhat like that of Downs, but the reality more like that of Namier.³⁹ Whether the choice of units is propitious

37. Clapp, *The Congressman*, p. 351.

38. See the argument in Leon D. Epstein, "A Comparative Study of Canadian Parties," 58 *American Political Science Review* 46-59 (1964).

*39. Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George*

can be shown only in the facts marshaled and the arguments embellished around them. With the units nailed down, still left unanswered is the question of whether congressmen in search of reelection are in a position to do anything about it.

Here it will be useful to deal first with the minority subset of congressmen who serve marginal districts or states—constituencies fairly evenly balanced between the parties. The reason for taking up the marginals separately is to consider whether their electoral precariousness ought to induce them to engage in distinctive electoral activities. Marginals have an obvious problem; to a substantial degree they are at the mercy of national partisan electoral swings. But general voter awareness of congressional legislative activities is low.⁴⁰ Hence national swings in the congressional vote are normally judgments on what the president is doing (or is thought to be doing) rather than on what Congress is doing. In the familiar case where parties controlling the presidency lose House seats in the midterm, swings seem to be not judgments on anything at all but rather artifacts of the election cycle.⁴¹ More along a judgment-

III (London: Macmillan, 1960). For a Namier passage on assemblies without disciplined parties see p. 17.

40. Donald E. Stokes and Warren E. Miller, "Party Government and the Saliency of Congress," ch. 11 in Angus Campbell et al., *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley, 1966), p. 199.

41. Angus Campbell, "Surge and Decline: A Study of Electoral Change," ch. 3 in *ibid.*; Barbara Hinckley, "Interpreting House

tal line, there has been an impressive relation over the years between partisan voting for the House and ups and downs in real income among voters. The national electorate rewards the congressional party of a president who reigns during economic prosperity and punishes the party of one who reigns during adversity.⁴² Rewards and penalties may be given by the same circuitous route for other states of affairs, including national involvement in wars.⁴³ With voters behaving the way they do, it is in the electoral interest of a marginal congressman to help insure that a presidential administration of his own party is a popular success or that one of the opposite party is a failure. (Purely from the standpoint of electoral interest there is no reason why a congressman with a safe seat should care one way or another.)

But what can a marginal congressman do to affect the fortunes of a presidency? One shorthand course a marginal serving under a president of his own party can take is to support him diligently in roll call voting; there is ambiguous evidence that relevant marginals

Midterm Elections: Toward a Measurement of the In-Party's 'Expected' Loss of Seats," 61 *American Political Science Review* 694-700 (1967).

42. Gerald H. Kramer, "Short-Term Fluctuations in U.S. Voting Behavior, 1896-1964," 65 *American Political Science Review* 131-43 (1971). See also the symposium on the Kramer findings in 63 *American Economic Review* 160-80 (May 1973).

43. Kramer, "U.S. Voting Behavior," p. 140. Wars seem to earn penalties.

do behave disproportionately in this fashion.⁴⁴ This strategy may not always be the best one. During the 1958 recession, for example, it may have been wise for marginal Republicans to support Democratic deficit-spending bills over the opposition of President Eisenhower; in the 1958 election Eisenhower's policies seem to have been ruinous for members of his own party. How about marginals of the opposition party? By the same logic it might be advantageous for opposition marginals to try to wreck the economy; if it were done unobtrusively the voters would probably blame the president, not them.

There are a number of intriguing theoretical possibilities here for marginals of parties both in and out of power. Yet marginals seem not to pay much attention to strategies of this sort, whether ingenious or ingenious. What we are pondering is whether individual marginals can realistically hope to do anything to affect the national component of the variance over time in congressional partisan election percentages.⁴⁵ And the answer seems to be no—or at least extraordinarily little. Leaving aside the problem of generating collective congressional action, there is the root problem of knowing what to try to do. It is hard to point to an instance in recent decades in which any group of

44. David B. Truman, *The Congressional Party* (New York: Wiley, 1959), pp. 213–18.

45. As in Stokes, "Parties and the Nationalization of Electoral Forces."

congressmen (marginals or not) has done something that has clearly changed the national congressional electoral percentage in a direction in which the group intended to change it (or to keep it stationary if that was the intention). There are too many imponderables. Most importantly, presidents follow their own logic. So do events. Not even economists can have a clear idea about what the effects of economic measures will be. The election cycle adds its own kind of perversity; the vigorous enactment of President Johnson's Great Society legislation (by all the survey evidence popular) was followed in 1966 by the largest Republican gain in House popular vote percentage of the last quarter century. Hence there is a lack of usable lore among congressmen on what legislative actions will produce what national electoral effects.⁴⁶

46. Nonetheless there are interesting questions here that have never been explored. Do marginal congressmen—or members generally—of the party not in control of the presidency try to sabotage the economy? Of course they must not appear to do so, but there are "respectable" ways of acting. How about Republicans in the Eightieth Congress with their tax cutting in time of inflation? Or Democrats with their spending programs under President Nixon—also in a time of inflation? The answer is probably no. It would have to be shown that the same congressmen's actions differ under presidencies of different parties, and they probably do not. Strategies like this not only require duplicity, they require a vigorous consciousness of distant effects of a sort that is foreign to the congressional mentality.

And there is after all the problem of generating collective action—especially action among nonmarginal congressmen who can watch national election percentages oscillate and presidents come and go with relative equanimity. All in all the rational way for marginal congressmen to deal with national trends is to ignore them, to treat them as acts of God over which they can exercise no control. It makes much more sense to devote resources to things over which they think they can have some control. There is evidence that marginals do think and act distinctively. House marginals are more likely than nonmarginals to turn up as “district-oriented” and “delegates” in role studies;⁴⁷ they introduce more floor amendments;⁴⁸ in general marginals of both houses display more frenzy in their election-oriented activities. But these activities are not directed toward affecting national election percentages. And although they may differ in intensity, they do not differ in kind from the activities engaged in by everybody else.

Are, then, congressmen in a position to do anything about getting reelected? If an answer is sought in their ability to affect national partisan percentages, the answer is no. But if an answer is sought in their ability to affect the percentages in their own primary and

47. Davidson, *Role of the Congressman*, p. 128.

48. David M. Olson and Cynthia T. Nondez, “Measures of Legislative Performance in the U.S. House of Representatives,” 16 *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 273-74 (1972).

general elections, the answer is yes. Or at least so the case will be presented here. More specifically, it will be argued that they think that they can affect their own percentages, that in fact they can affect their own percentages, and furthermore that there is reason for them to try to do so. This last is obvious for the marginals, but perhaps not so obvious for the nonmarginals. Are they not, after all, occupants of “safe seats”? It is easy to form an image of congressmen who inherit lush party pastures and then graze their way through careers without ever having to worry about elections. But this image is misconceived, and it is important to show why.

First, when looked at from the standpoint of a career, congressional seats are not as safe as they may seem. Of House members serving in the Ninety-third Congress 58 percent had at least one time in their careers won general elections with less than 55 percent of the total vote, 77 percent with less than 60 percent of the vote. For senators the figures were 70 percent and 86 percent (the last figure including fifteen of the twenty-two southerners). And aside from these November results there is competition in the primaries. The fact is that the typical congressman at least occasionally has won a narrow victory.⁴⁹

49. Over the long haul the proportion of seats switching from party to party is quite surprising. Of senators serving in the Ninety-third Congress, 56 had succeeded members of the opposite party in initially coming to the Senate, 43 had succeeded members

Second—to look at the election figures from a different angle—in United States House elections only about a third of the variance in partisan percentages over time is attributable to national swings. About half the variance is local (or, more properly, residual, the variance not explained by national and state components).⁵⁰ The local component is probably at least as high in Senate elections. Hence vote variation over which congressmen have reason to think they can exercise some control (i.e. the primary vote and the local component of the November vote) is substantial. What this comes down to in general elections is that district vote fluctuations beyond or in opposition to national trends can be quite striking. For example,

of the same party, and I (Hiram Fong, R., Hawaii) had come into the Senate at the same time his state entered the union. (Predecessors here are taken to be the last elected predecessors; i.e. interim appointees are ignored.) Of House members serving in the same Congress, 157 had originally succeeded members of the opposite party; 223 members of the same party; and 55 had originally taken newly created seats. (District continuity at the time of member transition is assumed here if a new district took in substantially the same territory as an old one.)

50. Stokes, "Parties and the Nationalization of Electoral Forces," p. 186. Thus the American ranking of vote components in order of importance differs from the British ranking. Richard S. Katz has recently introduced a measurement technique that yields higher national components. Katz, "The Attribution of Variance in Electoral Returns: An Alternative Measurement Technique," *67 American Political Science Review* 817-28 (1973). But the British-American disparity presumably remains. There is a Stokes rejoinder at pp. 829-34.

between 1968 and 1970 the Republican share of the national House vote fell 3.3 percent, but the share of Congressman Chester L. Mize (R., Kans.) fell from 67.6 percent to 45.0 percent, and he lost his seat. In 1972 four incumbent Republican senators lost their seats; in general 1972 was not a bad year for congressional Republicans, and all four senators had won in 1966 with at least 58 percent of the vote. And so it goes. In addition, there are the primaries.⁵¹ It is hard for anyone to feel absolutely secure in an electoral environment of this sort. In Kingdon's interview study of candidates who had just run for office in Wisconsin (about a third of them running for Congress) the proportion who recalled having been "uncertain" about electoral outcome during their campaigns was high, and the incidence of uncertainty was only modestly related to actual electoral outcome.⁵²

51. In the 1964-72 period ten House committee chairmen lost their primaries.

52. John W. Kingdon, *Candidates for Office: Beliefs and Strategies* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 86-89. Richard F. Fenn, Jr., who has recently been traveling with incumbent congressmen in their districts—some of them very "safe" districts indeed—detects a pervasive feeling of electoral insecurity: "One of the dominant impressions of my travels is the terrific sense of uncertainty which animates these congressmen. They perceive electoral troubles where the most imaginative outside observer could not possibly perceive, conjure up or hallucinate them." Fenn, "Congressmen in Their Constituencies," unpublished manuscript, pp. 6-7.