

But the local vote component cuts two ways; if losses are possible, so presumably are gains. In particular, it seems to be possible for some incumbents to beef up their November percentages beyond normal party levels in their constituencies. In the House (but apparently not in the Senate) the overall electoral value of incumbency seems to have risen in the last decade⁵³—although of course some House incumbents still do lose their seats.

Third, there is a more basic point. The ultimate

53. From about 2 percent in the 1950s to about 5 percent in 1966 and maybe higher in 1970-72. See Robert S. Erikson, "The Advantage of Incumbency in Congressional Elections," 3 *Polity* 395-405 (1971); Erikson, "Malapportionment, Gerrymandering, and Party Fortunes in Congressional Elections," 66 *American Political Science Review* 1240 (1972); David R. Mayhew, "Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals," forthcoming in *Polity*, Spring 1974. It is not clear what accounts for the rise in incumbency value, not even certain that it is attributable to the election-oriented activities of incumbents. But some of the electoral sagas of recent years are truly startling. There is the case of the Wisconsin seventh district, strongly Republican for years in the hands of Melvin R. Laird. Laird's last percentages were 65.1 percent in 1966 and 64.1 percent in 1968. When Laird went to the cabinet, David R. Obey took the seat for the Democrats with 51.6 percent in a 1969 by-election. Obey won with 67.6 percent in 1970 and then with 63.5 percent in a 1972 election in which he was forced to run against an incumbent Republican in a merged district. On Obey's election-oriented activities see Norman C. Miller, "Privileges of Rank: New Congressman Finds Campaigning Is Easier Now That He's in Office," *Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 1969, p. 1.

concern here is not how probable it is that legislators will lose their seats but whether there is a connection between what they do in office and their need to be reelected. It is possible to conceive of an assembly in which no member ever comes close to losing a seat but in which the need to be reelected is what inspires members' behavior. It would be an assembly with no saints or fools in it, an assembly packed with skilled politicians going about their business. When we say "Congressman Smith is unbeatable," we do not mean that there is nothing he could do that would lose him his seat. Rather we mean, "Congressman Smith is unbeatable as long as he continues to do the things he is doing." If he stopped answering his mail, or stopped visiting his district, or began voting randomly on roll calls, or shifted his vote record eighty points on the ADA scale, he would bring on primary or November election troubles in a hurry. It is difficult to offer conclusive proof that this last statement is true, for there is no congressman willing to make the experiment. But normal political activity among politicians with healthy electoral margins should not be confused with inactivity. What characterizes "safe" congressmen is not that they are beyond electoral reach, but that their efforts are very likely to bring them uninterrupted electoral success.

Whether congressmen think their activities have electoral impact, and whether in fact they have impact, are of course two separate questions. Of the

former there can be little doubt that the answer is yes. In fact in their own minds successful politicians probably overestimate the impact they are having. Kingdon found in his Wisconsin candidates a "congratulation-rationalization effect," a tendency for winners to take personal credit for their victories and for losers to assign their losses to forces beyond their control.⁵⁴ The actual impact of politicians' activities is more difficult to assess. The evidence on the point is soft and scattered. It is hard to find variance in activities undertaken, for there are no politicians who consciously try to lose. There is no doubt that the electorate's general awareness of what is going on in Congress is something less than robust.⁵⁵ Yet the argument here will be that congressmen's activities in fact do have electoral impact. Pieces of evidence will be brought in as the discussion proceeds.⁵⁶

54. Kingdon, *Candidates for Office*, p. 31. Charles S. Bullock III has recently found the same effect in a study of United States House incumbents and challengers in the 1972 election. Bullock, "Candidate Perceptions of Causes of Election Outcome," paper presented to the annual convention of the American Political Science Association, 1973.

55. Stokes and Miller, "Party Government."

56. The most sophisticated treatment of this subject is in Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," ch. 16 in Campbell et al., *Elections and the Political Order*, pp. 366-70. Note that a weird but important kind of accountability relationship would exist if congressmen thought their activities had impact even if in fact they had none at all.

The next step here is to offer a brief conceptual treatment of the relation between congressmen and their electorates. In the Downsian analysis what national party leaders must worry about is voters' "expected party differential."⁵⁷ But to congressmen this is in practice irrelevant, for reasons specified earlier. A congressman's attention must rather be devoted to what can be called an "expected incumbent differential." Let us define this "expected incumbent differential" as any difference perceived by a relevant political actor between what an incumbent congressman is likely to do if returned to office and what any possible challenger (in primary or general election) would be likely to do. And let us define "relevant political actor" here as anyone who has a resource that might be used in the election in question. At the ballot box the only usable resources are votes, but there are resources that can be translated into votes: money, the ability to make persuasive endorsements, organizational skills, and so on. By this definition a "relevant political actor" need not be a constituent; one of the most important resources, money, flows all over the country in congressional campaign years.⁵⁸

57. Downs, *Economic Theory of Democracy*, pp. 38-45.

58. To give an extreme example, in the North Dakota Senate campaign of 1970 an estimated 85 to 90 percent of the money spent by candidates of both parties came from out of state. Philip M. Stern, *The Rape of the Taxpayer* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 384.

It must be emphasized that the average voter has only the haziest awareness of what an incumbent congressman is actually doing in office.⁵⁹ But an incumbent has to be concerned about actors who do form impressions about him, and especially about actors who can marshal resources other than their own votes. Senator Robert C. Byrd (D., W.Va.) has a "little list" of 2,545 West Virginians he regularly keeps in touch with.⁶⁰ A congressman's assistant interviewed for a Nader profile in 1972 refers to the "thought leadership" back in the district.⁶¹ Of campaign re-

59. For thousands of November voters totally unaware of candidate particularities the commonest election criterion is no doubt the party label on the ballot. These voters are normally left undisturbed in their ignorance, although candidates may find it useful to deploy resources to get the right ones to the polls. But it must not be assumed that there are no circumstances under which such voters can be aroused into vigorous candidate awareness.

60. Robert Sherrill, "The Embodiment of Poor White Power," *New York Times Magazine*, February 28, 1971, p. 51.

61. Ellen Szita, Ralph Nader Congress Project profile on Garner E. Shriver (R., Kans.) (Washington, D.C.: Grossman, 1972), p. 14. Shriver's administrative assistant was asked about the district value of the congressman's Appropriations Committee membership. His answer: "Projectwise, it's been valuable. . . . I wouldn't say the majority of his constituents recognize that the Appropriations Committee is one of the most important—just those I would term the 'thought leadership' in the district." The interviewer adds that it must be the "community leadership in Wichita" the assistant was referring to, for, when asked, "with few exceptions . . . the leaders listed more than ten different federally-subsidized projects that Representative Shriver had brought to the

sources one of the most vital is money. An incumbent not only has to assure that his own election funds are adequate, he has to try to minimize the probability that actors will bankroll an expensive campaign against him. There is the story that during the first Nixon term Senator James B. Pearson (R., Kans.) was told he would face a well-financed opponent in his 1972 primary if he did not display more party regularity in his voting.⁶² Availability of money can affect strength of opposition candidacy in both primary and general elections.⁶³

fourth district." (Congress Project profiles referred to in future footnotes will be called "Nader profiles" for short. For all of them the more complete citation is the one given here.)

62. Dennis Harvey, "How GOP Sen. Pearson Went from Sure Loser to Sure Winner in 1972," *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 1972, p. 1.

63. There is the following report of an election problem suffered by Congressman Torbert H. Macdonald (D., Mass.), chairman of the Communications and Power Subcommittee of the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee: "His fear of opposition from some of these industries is so overwhelming that they have succeeded in immobilizing him with regard to regulatory legislation. For example several years ago he received a political scare when the electric companies bankrolled his opponent in the general election. Since then, according to [Congressman Robert O.] Tiernan [D., R.I.], 'Macdonald will not touch them.' That interpretation is confirmed by Macdonald's former aid, Mary Kuhn, who states that 'Even though Torby easily defeated his opponent, the experience made him sort of paranoid. He is now reluctant to do anything that would offend the power people.'" John Paris's chapter on "Communications" in David E.

Another resource of significance is organizational expertise, probably more important than money among labor union offerings. Simple ability to do electioneering footwork is a resource the invoking of which may give campaigns an interesting twist. Leuthold found in studying ten 1962 House elections in the San Francisco area that 50 percent of campaign workers held college degrees (as against 12 percent of the Bay area population), and that the workers were more issue oriented than the general population.⁶⁴ The need to attract workers may induce candidates to traffic in issues more than they otherwise would. Former Congressman Allard K. Lowenstein (D., N.Y.) has as his key invokable resource a corps of student volunteers who will follow him from district to district, making him an unusually mobile candidate.

Still another highly important resource is the ability to make persuasive endorsements. Manhattan candidates angle for the imprimatur of the *New York Times*. New Hampshire politics rotates around endorsements of the *Manchester Union Leader*. Labor union committees circulate their approved lists. Chicago Democratic politicians seek the endorsement of the mayor. In the San Francisco area and elsewhere House candidates

Price (ed.), "The House and Senate Committees on Commerce" (unpublished manuscript), p. 161. The reference is apparently to the election of 1968, when Macdonald's percentage fell to 62.5. It is normally well over 65.

64. Leuthold, *Electioneering in a Democracy*, pp. 92-94.

try to score points by winning endorsements from officials of the opposite party.⁶⁵ As Neustadt argues, the influence of the president over congressmen (of both parties) varies with his public prestige and with his perceived ability to punish and reward.⁶⁶ One presidential tool is the endorsement, which can be carefully calibrated according to level of fervor, and which can be given to congressmen or to challengers running against congressmen. In the 1970 election Senator Charles Goodell (R., N.Y.), who had achieved public salience by attacking the Nixon administration, was apparently done in by the resources called forth by that attack; the vice president implicitly endorsed his Conservative opponent, and the administration acted to channel normally Republican money away from Goodell.⁶⁷

What a congressman has to try to do is to insure that in primary and general elections the resource balance (with all other deployed resources finally translated into votes) favors himself rather than somebody else. To maneuver successfully he must remain

65. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

66. Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power* (New York: New American Library, 1964), chs. 4, 5.

67. Of course when the president's poll ratings drop, so do his ability to punish and reward and his influence over congressmen. When they drop very low, it becomes politically profitable for congressmen of his own party to attack him—as with Democrats in 1951-52 and Republicans in 1973-74.

A final conceptual point has to do with whether congressmen's behavior should be characterized as "maximizing" behavior. Does it make sense to visualize the congressman as a maximizer of vote percentage in elections—November or primary or, with some complex trade-off, both? For two reasons the answer is probably no. The first has to do with his goal itself, which is to stay in office rather than to win all the popular vote. More precisely his goal is to stay in office over a number of future elections, which does mean that "winning comfortably" in any one of them (except the last) is more desirable than winning by a narrow plurality. The logic here is that a narrow victory (in primary or general election) is a sign of weakness that can inspire hostile political actors to deploy resources intensively the next time around. By this reasoning the higher the election percentages the better. No doubt any congressman would engage in an act to raise his November figure from 80 percent to 90

Italian parliamentary elections each voter registers a vote for a favored party's candidate list, but then can also cast preference votes for individual candidates on that list. Whether a given candidate gets elected depends both on how well his party does against other parties and how well he does against nominees of his own party. Mass organizations (e.g. labor and farm groups) capable of mobilizing preference votes reap benefits in the parliament, "where nothing seems to count so much as the ability to deliver the required number of preference votes." Joseph LaPalombara, *Interest Groups in Italian Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 248-49.

percent if he could be absolutely sure that the act would accomplish the end (without affecting his primary percentage) and if it could be undertaken at low personal cost. But still, trying to "win comfortably" is not the same as trying to win all the popular vote. As the personal cost (e.g. expenditure of personal energy) of a hypothetical "sure gain" rises, the congressman at the 55 percent November level is more likely to be willing to pay it than his colleague at the 80 percent level.

The second and more decisive reason why a pure maximization model is inappropriate is that congressmen act in an environment of high uncertainty. An assumption of minimax behavior therefore gives a better fit. Behavior of an innovative sort can yield vote gains, but it can also bring disaster (as in Senator Goodell's case). For the most part it makes sense for congressmen to follow conservative strategies. Each member, after all, is a recent victor of two elections (primary and general), and it is only reasonable for him to believe that whatever it was that won for him the last time is good enough to win the next time. When a congressman has a contented primary electorate and a comfortable November percentage, it makes sense to sit tight, to try to keep the coalition together. Where November constituencies are polarized in the conventional fashion—labor and liberals on one side, business on the other—there is hardly any alternative. Yet simply repeating the activities of the past is of

course impossible, for the world changes. There are always new voters, new events, new issues. Congressmen therefore need conservative strategies for dealing with change. And they have some. For members with conventional supporting coalitions it can be useful to accept party cues in deciding how to cast roll call votes;⁷² a Republican House member from Indiana can hardly go wrong in following the party line (though for an Alabama Democrat or a Massachusetts Republican it would be madness to do so). It may be useful to build a voting record that blends in with the records of party colleagues in one's state delegation.⁷³ It is surely useful to watch other members' primary and general elections to try to gain clues on voter temperament. But conservatism can be carried only so

72. On cues generally see Donald R. Matthews and James A. Stimson, "Cue-Taking by Congressmen: A Model and a Computer Simulation," paper presented at Conference on the Use of Quantitative Methods in the Study of the History of Legislative Behavior, 1972; and John E. Jackson, "Statistical Models of Senate Roll Call Voting," 65 *American Political Science Review* 451-70 (1971).

73. See Aage Clausen, *How Congressmen Decide: A Policy Focus* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), ch. 7. Fiellin writes on the New York delegation: "Most important of all, perhaps, is that the member in taking cues from the New York group cannot get into electoral difficulties as a result of deviation. There is security in numbers." Alan Fiellin, "The Functions of Informal Groups: A State Delegation," ch. 3 in Robert L. Peabody and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *New Perspectives on the House of Representatives* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), p. 113.

far. It requires a modest degree of venturesomeness just to hold an old coalition together. And for members in great electoral danger (again, Goodell) it may on balance be wise to resort to ostentatious innovation.

Whether they are safe or marginal, cautious or audacious, congressmen must constantly engage in activities related to reelection. There will be differences in emphasis, but all members share the root need to do things—indeed, to do things day in and day out during their terms. The next step here is to present a typology, a short list of the *kinds* of activities congressmen find it electorally useful to engage in. The case will be that there are three basic kinds of activities. It will be important to lay them out with some care, for arguments in part 2 will be built on them.

One activity is *advertising*, defined here as any effort to disseminate one's name among constituents in such a fashion as to create a favorable image but in messages having little or no issue content. A successful congressman builds what amounts to a brand name, which may have a generalized electoral value for other politicians in the same family. The personal qualities to emphasize are experience, knowledge, responsiveness, concern, sincerity, independence, and the like. Just getting one's name across is difficult enough; only about half the electorate, if asked, can supply their House members' names. It helps a congressman to be known. "In the main, recognition carries a positive