

Baumgartner, Poli 718, Agenda-Setting, Spring 2014

Questions for Week 10.

Readings: *Congress and the Politics of Problem-Solving*.

1. Why is it so revolutionary to say that Members of Congress care about solving problems? This is a serious question. How does this fit in with Mayhew's idea that Members are "single-minded seekers of reelection"? Has that perspective pushed legislative studies away from something important?
2. Take immigration reform. In the current Congress, it is widely recognized as an important problem. A polarization perspective might suggest that the parties will fail to come together because Republicans prefer to avoid compromise on this issue. Ditto with climate change. What is the Adler-Wilkerson perspective on this?
3. They focus a lot on the scarcity of the agenda, and argue that this has been ignored in legislative studies. They then move back to Walker 1977 to discuss "discretionary" and "compulsory" items, though they change the vocabulary a little. Is the Farm Bill compulsory? What makes something compulsory?
4. Chapter 2 argues that voters care about congressional performance, not just ideology. Review the scope of the evidence presented in this chapter. Compare to the average journal article. Just how much research is reported here? Now add in Chapter 3 to what we learned in Chapter 2; they posit a theory that voters hold Members accountable for overall congressional performance, and that this effect is significant, controlling for party, president, and other factors. How much and what types of information went in to this analysis? Now what do you think of Chapter 2, after having read Chapter 3?
5. Chapter 4 begins to develop a theory of why a Member would be willing to invest time and energy in becoming an expert on a given topic. Explain the theory. What elements of this theory are new?
6. Is Figure 7.4 (p. 130) really all you need to know? What are the implications of this? What research went into producing that simple graph?
7. One prominent theory says that a majority party in Congress, as it controls the agenda, simply will refuse to bring up votes that divide its members or are not in the interest of the party. Adler and Wilkerson disagree; they say a party cannot avoid those issues which they call "compulsory." How fundamental is this? Who is right?
8. Looking at this book overall, it is clearly not what I would call a "dissertation-scope" work (we will read several that are, later, for example Boydston's). How would you describe the data collection effort that went in to this book? Adler and Wilkerson conducted the Congressional Bills Project, which assigns Agendas Project codes to 400,000+ bills introduced in Congress, from 1947 onwards. But they did not write a book that was a simple data report, did they? How much to they gain from their wide-ranging use of so many different data sources?