

Insecure Majorities

Congress and the Perpetual Campaign

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The Ins versus the Outs

The central variable in a party system is the level of competitiveness. — Joseph Schlesinger (1985, 1154)

Today, in 2016, the Democratic and Republican Parties face each other at roughly equal strength. Almost every election offers the prospect of a change of party control over one national institution or another. Since 1980, Democrats and Republicans have each held the presidency about half the time. The Senate majority changed hands seven times between 1980 and 2016, with Democrats and Republicans each in the majority for nine Congresses. The House majority shifted three times during the same period, also with Democrats and Republicans each holding the majority for nine Congresses. Nearly three decades have elapsed since the last presidential landslide. Divided government is the norm. Margins of control in Congress are persistently narrow. Both parties can generally count on receiving between 47 and 53 percent of all the votes cast in congressional elections any given year. In 2002, *The Economist* magazine dubbed the United States the “50–50 nation,” and subsequent elections have altered the picture little. The two parties remain locked in a ferocious power struggle for control of US national government.

Yet it has not always been so. For decades after 1932, Democrats were, by all appearances, the nation’s majority party. Democrats maintained majority control of both the House and the Senate for nearly a half century between 1933 and 1981, interrupted only by two brief Republican interludes (1947–48 and 1953–54). The Democrats controlled the presidency two-thirds of the time during this period. Divided government was atypical. The Democrats’ margins usually seemed insurmountable.

On average, Democrats held 60 percent of the seats and, with some frequency, majorities of 2:1. Even after Richard Nixon won one of the presidency's largest popular-vote shares ever in 1972, Democrats still held 57 Senate seats and 291 House seats, and their margins swelled further in the 1974 midterms. In the Congress of this era, Democrats were "something of a 'party of state'" (Mayhew 1974, 104).

The central argument of this book is that these changed competitive circumstances have had far-reaching effects on political incentives in Washington. Intense party competition for institutional control focuses members of Congress on the quest for partisan political advantage. When party control seemingly hangs in the balance, members and leaders of both parties invest more effort in enterprises to promote their own party's image and undercut that of the opposition. These efforts at party image making often stand in the way of cross-party cooperation on legislation.

The primary way that parties make an electoral case for themselves vis-à-vis their opposition is by magnifying their differences. Parties continually contrive to give voters an answer to the question, "Why should you support us and not the other party?" In some form or another, the answer has to claim, "Because we're *different!*" Differences can be defined along ideological lines, and ideological differences are often useful for appealing to party base voters, activists, and donors. However, nonideological appeals accusing the other party of corruption, failure, or incompetence are at least equally valuable and can potentially attract swing voters, as well as fire up the base. Difference drawing by no means entails only a focus on cultivating the image of one's own party. In a two-party system, one party's loss is another party's gain. As such, a party benefits from harming the opposing party's image. A party looks for ways to make its opposition appear weak and incompetent, as well as ideologically extreme and out of touch with mainstream public opinion. As parties angle for competitive advantage using such tactics, the upshot is a more confrontational style of partisanship in Congress.

Party image making impels an active quest to define and broadcast party messages. Fellow partisans seek issues and talking points around which they can coalesce that will also favorably distinguish their party from the opposition. At the same time, party image making also involves a continual hunt for issues that allow a party to score political points by putting its opposition on the wrong side of public opinion. Parties in Congress routinely try to force recorded votes on issues that will cast

their opposition in an unattractive light. When these votes work as intended, they elicit party conflict and foreground party differences. Party image making extends beyond floor votes to the whole arena of communications. Parties' pursuit of advantage in public relations has fueled the creation and institutionalization of extensive partisan communications operations inside the legislative branch. These increasingly large and professionalized staffs of party communicators produce a steady stream of tough criticism of the opposing party, along with advertising, issue positioning, and credit claiming aimed at burnishing the party brand.

The quest for party differences cuts against bipartisan collaboration on legislative issues. An out party does not win a competitive edge by participating in, voting for, and thereby legitimating the in party's initiatives. Instead, an out party angling for partisan advantage will look for reasons to withhold support and oppose. If a particular initiative championed by an in party is sufficiently popular, an out party may prefer to dodge a fight on that issue. But an out party nevertheless must stake out some ground on which it can define differences in order to make a case for retaking power.

Partisan calculations such as these will weigh more heavily on political decision making under more party-competitive conditions. When majority status is not at stake, there are fewer incentives to concentrate so intently on winning partisan advantage. Members of Congress have less reason to systematically pursue strategies of partisan differentiation or to establish party institutions designed to drive favorable news coverage. But when majority status is in play, members of out parties tend to think in terms of winning the long game of institutional control rather than the short game of wielding influence by cooperating in policy making in the present moment. When competing for majority status, parties focus more intently on public relations, messaging, and related strategies designed to win the high stakes in contention.

During the long years of the so-called permanent Democratic majority after 1932, Republicans did not see much prospect of winning majority status and Democrats did not perceive much chance of losing their majorities. Under such uncompetitive conditions, one would expect to find scant effort expended on party organization. Party collective action during much of this era was, in fact, quite meager. Parties rarely met in caucus. Legislative party organizations were bare bones. There was little to no partisan communications apparatus in either chamber. Reflecting on his party's long minority status, Rep. William A. Steiger (R-WI) said

in 1976, “The seemingly permanent minority status debilitates party members” (Freed 1976). Jones (1970, 170–74) described the Republicans of the era as struggling with a “minority party mentality,” in which members had given up on efforts to build toward majority status.

“The critical characteristic of a competitive party system is insecurity,” argued Schlesinger (1985, 1167). Insecurity, in turn, motivates partisan exertions. Under competitive conditions, “both parties will put forth a high level of effort” to win; meanwhile, when a single party is dominant, “the effort of the controlling party will be minimal [and] that of the hopeless party will at best be token” (1154). These generalizations apply to parties at many levels. Presidential campaigns ignore states that are not in play (Gimpel et al. 2007; Shaw 2008). Incumbents in districts and states perceived as “safe” often fail to draw quality challengers or any challengers at all (Carson 2005; Jacobson 2013; Squire 1989a, 1989b). Donors give and candidates spend far more money in competitive elections than in uncompetitive ones (Gimpel et al. 2008; Herrnson 1992).

These same incentives apply inside Congress, as members decide whether or not to organize and participate in collective efforts to win or hold majority status. Members and leaders have little reason to invest in partisan enterprises when they perceive no chance for majority control to shift. Competition for majority control, however, incentivizes them to put forth more partisan effort. The prospect of collective reward or punishment gives members stronger motivation to cooperate as a party team. A secure majority party behaves differently from a party that fears losing power. A minority party optimistic about winning a majority behaves differently from a hopeless minority. Members of insecure parties worry more about partisan advantage and work harder to win it.

When neither party sees itself as a permanent minority or a permanent majority, leaders and members invest more heavily in party organization and partisan collective action. As one Senate Republican leader’s communication director put it in 2001, “There’s nothing more important than getting back our majority. It’s an issue that unites all of us on communicating our message, on legislative tactics, and on outreach” (Straub and Fonder 2001). With both parties similarly motivated, the result is a better organized, harder-edged, more forceful style of partisanship in US national politics.

In the simplest terms, then, the thesis of the book is that party com-

petition strengthens partisan incentives and motivates partisan strategic action. In other words, the level of party competition serves as the key independent variable in the analysis. Party competition is measured both objectively, via the outcomes of national elections and the distribution of partisan identification in the electorate, and subjectively, via the perceptions of members and journalists about the likelihood of shifts in party control.

In treating party competition as an independent variable, my goal is *not* to explain why American politics became more two-party competitive. I view the intensification of party competition as the result of broader forces in American politics external to Congress, primarily the breakup of the New Deal coalition and the partisan realignment of the South. My argument is that this transformed electoral landscape changed the political calculations of members of Congress in a fundamental way. For decades, members of Congress inhabited a political landscape where one party seemed to have a lock on majority control. Since 1980 and 1994, when Republicans finally ousted the long-standing Democratic majorities in the Senate and House respectively, members have served under conditions where the two parties compete for control of Congress at relative parity. Neither party perceives itself as a permanent majority or permanent minority. The argument is that this shift altered members' partisan incentives and strategic choices in ways that help drive the sharp and contentious partisanship that is characteristic of contemporary American politics.

By itself, no single part of this book offers “smoking gun” evidence in support of the thesis. The central difficulty is that the dependent variables—incentives and strategies—cannot be observed directly. One cannot ascertain intentions and motivations simply from behavioral indicators, such as votes, amendments, staff allocations, or other such data. Instead, the book employs a methodology of triangulation (Denzin 1970; Rothbauer 2008; Tarrow 1995, 473–74), in which an unobserved quantity is ascertained via cross-verification from different data sources. Seeking insight into partisan incentives and strategies during different eras, I turn to historical narratives as well as to data on leadership contests, caucus meetings, the content and frequency of partisan communications, staff organization, floor amending activity, and roll-call votes. Together, these data tell a rich and compelling story about the important changes wrought by increases in party competition.

Specifically, this book turns to five sources of evidence for the key claims:

1. *First-person testimony.* Members of Congress and their staff frankly admit to strategically pursuing partisan confrontation as a means of making an electoral case for their own party vis-à-vis the opposition. They discuss how the imperatives of party messaging trade off against bipartisan participation in legislating. How a party weighs these trade-offs is affected by its institutional position. Parties with more institutional power place more emphasis on legislating; parties with less power focus more on messaging. Across the board, messaging takes a higher priority when majority control is insecure.
2. *Internal party debates after 1980.* The surprise Republican capture of a Senate majority in 1980 set off internal debates about strategy and organization within minority parties in both chambers. Senate Democrats and House Republicans began to meet more frequently than they had throughout the 1960s and 1970s to plot strategy, messages, and tactics. These internal party debates and, in key cases, leadership contests largely centered on the choice between partisan confrontation aimed at winning majorities and constructive negotiation to influence policy making. After 1980, forces favoring more confrontation steadily gained advantage, and the minority parties in both chambers became more aggressive in using floor votes and floor debate to define party differences.
3. *The creation and institutionalization of partisan public-relations operations.* Since 1980, both parties have built an extensive apparatus for generating and disseminating partisan messages in both chambers of Congress. Analysis of the content of these messages reveals a strong emphasis on partisan blaming and finger-pointing. Professional communicators have become increasingly influential players in the Hill's power hierarchy, at some cost to staff with substantive policy expertise.
4. *The rise of the partisan message vote.* I examine the increased use of the partisan message vote, meaning votes staged for the purpose of highlighting differences between the parties with no expectation of influencing policy outcomes. Members and staff of both parties candidly acknowledge use of this tactic. Patterns in floor amending activity in the Senate point to wider use of amendments for party message purposes after 1980 than between 1959 and 1980. As a case study in message votes, the book also offers an analysis of congressional behavior on increases in the debt limit since the 1950s. Debt-limit votes were used for partisan position taking throughout the period, but parties have exploited these messaging opportunities more aggressively since 1980.

5. *Comparative state legislatures.* Given that this book's argument ought to apply to other contexts beyond Congress, variation across states is examined for evidence of a relationship between party competition and legislative party conflict. Analyses drawing upon an array of different measures show that more two-party-competitive states systematically have more party-polarized legislatures.

Scholarly Perspectives on Washington Partisanship

In the new political order, nothing is more important than either winning or holding a majority. — Veteran Hill-watcher Charlie Cook (2014)

Scholars have not sufficiently considered how the broader competitive environment affects the incentives for members of Congress to engage in partisan conflict. This book argues that when majority status is perceived to be “in play,” members will be more willing to participate in partisan collective action in pursuit of partisan collective gains. As such, the book posits that the struggle for institutional power drives much partisan conflict. This argument stands in tension with political scientists' standard explanation for the scope and intensity of party conflict: ideological polarization. The ideological distance between the parties is generally viewed as the central challenge for lawmaking and governance (see, e.g., McCarty et al. 2006; Poole and Rosenthal 2011).

The ideological composition of the parties is unquestionably an important driver of congressional partisanship and the activities of party leaders (Cooper and Brady 1981; Rohde 1991). There is no denying that there have been significant ideological changes within and between the two parties. Regional realignment has contributed to the ideological homogenization of party constituencies (Black and Black 2002, 2007; Jacobson 2013; Rohde 1991; Theriault 2008). In particular, the major parties are much more cohesive now that civil-rights issues no longer divide them internally along regional lines (Noel 2013; Schickler 2013). Since the 1970s, the major parties have incorporated new constituencies, including gun-rights advocates, social conservatives, and LGBT-rights supporters, thereby bringing the “culture war” debates into the party system (Karol 2009, 2012). The preferences of contemporary Republican and Democratic Party activists are more distinct from one another than in the past (Layman et al. 2010), as are those of the attentive rank-

and-file partisans in the electorate (Abramowitz 2010; Ellis and Stimson 2012; Fiorina and Abrams 2009; Pew Research Center 2014).

The goal of this book is not to call into question the importance of changes in party coalitions and ideologies in American politics. Instead, my purpose is to draw attention to another significant factor: the intensification of party competition for institutional control. Scholars' nearly exclusive focus on policy preferences as a driver of partisan conflict underestimates the role of strategic behavior and the ways that party strategies are likely to change under different competitive conditions. In advancing this argument, the goal is not to rule out changes in policy preferences as a rival hypothesis. It is instead to insist upon an account that takes both factors into consideration. Ideally, I would like to be able to partition out the variance so as to nail down precisely how much party conflict can be attributable to ideology and how much to party competition. Unfortunately, the question is plagued by problems of observational equivalence. No existing method of measuring members' ideological preferences can offer traction, because these measures cannot ascertain the reasons the parties vote differently (Aldrich et al. 2014). Political science's standard measures of ideological preferences cannot differentiate partisan conflict rooted in competitive incentives from partisan conflict rooted in ideology (Lee 2009).

Both ideology and competition are likely to affect members' behavior for the simple reason that members of Congress have "power preferences" as well as policy preferences. They must also make strategic choices. These choices, in turn, depend in part upon whether members perceive any prospect for winning or losing majorities in Congress. Scholars generally recognize that holding majority status matters greatly to members. Over the past two decades, scholars have made members' motivations to win and hold party majorities a foundation for entire theories of congressional leadership and institutional organization (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Green 2010, 2015; Smith 2007). But this literature has not yet considered how members' concern with winning and holding majority status has differed depending upon the competitive context.

Party competition for institutional control has not been a constant fact of life throughout congressional history. It was not a prominent feature of the long-ago "textbook Congress" (Shepsle 1989). When Democrats seemingly held a permanent majority, members of neither party gave much thought to how they might better compete for majority status.

Accordingly, the scholarship on congressional parties and leaders published in the 1960s and 1970s had virtually no comment on any efforts being made to win or hold party majorities. For example, *Understanding Congressional Leadership*, a three-hundred-page volume with contributions from the field's leading scholars in 1981, devotes a mere five paragraphs to the subject (Mackaman 1981). None of the chapters on the House of Representatives mentions this facet of a party leader's job, and a chapter on the Senate (Peabody 1981, 89–90) just briefly references Sen. Howard Baker's (R-TN) hopes of winning a Republican majority. Similarly, Sinclair's (1983, 1995) early books on congressional leadership contain no sustained discussion of leaders' efforts to pursue or preserve majority status in Congress. This shift in the scholarly literature is probably not the result of scholarly misperception in either era. It is more likely that partisan messaging and image making were simply not very salient concerns for leaders and members during times when there seemed little prospect for changes in party control. The quest for majority status only became a priority for members when the return of competition threw control of Congress into doubt.

The renewal of competition for majority control stands at the root of much change in the behavior of parties and leaders in Congress. Heberlig and Larson (2012) detail how the ongoing contest for congressional majorities has transformed congressional parties into fundraising machines. Committee leaders and rank-and-file party members are assessed dues to be paid into the party's campaign committees. Ambitious members jockey for leadership positions by demonstrating their fundraising prowess (see also Cann 2008). Theriault (2013) documents the emergence of "partisan warriors" in the Senate, a group of hard-edged partisans primarily made up of Republican former House members first elected after 1978. In addition, a growing literature analyzes the enhanced media visibility of congressional leaders, the development of messaging campaigns, and individual members' willingness to participate in party messaging (Butler and Powell 2014; Evans and Oleszek 2002; Grimmer 2013; Groeling 2010; Harris 1998, 2005, 2013; Malecha and Reagan 2012; Sellers 2010).

Yet few scholars have seriously considered how party competition for majority control of the institution relates to the escalation and intensification of party conflict inside Congress itself. After all, party competition is not confined to the campaign trail. Members believe that what happens in Congress affects their party's electoral prospects. As

such, campaign strategizing intrudes upon the legislative process itself as members weigh how their behavior on issues might gain or cost their party competitive advantage. Members actively enlist legislative resources, including staff time and floor votes, in the service of partisan public relations.

For deeper consideration of how competition can structure party behavior on legislation, one might instead look to scholarship on legislatures in other democracies. A dominant cleavage in legislatures around the world is “government-versus-opposition” or, put differently, the ins versus the outs. Battles in many parliaments largely take place between the parties in government and those in opposition, and not along left-right lines (Dewan and Spirling 2011; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998; Godbout and Høyland 2011; Hix and Noury forthcoming; Spirling and McLean 2007). Members of parties not in government will typically oppose the government’s bills, even when they prefer them to the policy status quo (Dewan and Spirling 2011; Spirling and McLean 2007). As such, parliamentarians do not vote according to their sincere ideological preferences (Diermeier and Feddersen 1998).

Out parties in parliamentary systems methodically refuse to vote for the government’s bills in order to signal their opposition to the government overall and as the backdrop to their campaign for a change of majorities. By withholding their support, out parties increase the pressure on the party or coalition in power by forcing it to marshal all the necessary votes from within the ranks of its own backbenchers (Dewan and Spirling 2011). This obliges a majority coalition to bear the burdens of governance on its own and allows the out parties to capitalize on public discontent with the in parties’ performance. The prevalence of this behavior has made parliamentary roll-call voting much less interesting to scholars than the (historically) less predictable behavior in the US Congress.

There is reason to think that this type of government-versus-opposition partisanship also occurs in the US Congress, particularly under conditions of increased competition for majority control. After all, the United States has a rigidly two-party system, in which dissatisfaction with the party in power redounds to the political advantage of the party not in power.

As in other democracies, the minority party in Congress stands to gain political benefit from strategically resisting the majority. Strategic

opposition means voting no even when members would, in fact, prefer the proposed policy to the status quo (Green 2015; Jones 1970). First, voting no offers the minority party an opportunity to publicly criticize the deficiencies of the majority's efforts and to tout its alternatives (Egar 2015). The minority may still opt to oppose even after it has been granted significant legislative concessions (Schickler and Pearson 2009, 462). Second, the minority's opposition increases pressure on the majority, in that a majority deprived of assistance from the minority may struggle to maintain its unity and look less than competent in the process (Groeling 2010). Third, lack of help from the minority will force the majority party to attempt to whip its marginal members in order to carry the party's agenda. These controversial votes are likely to yield fodder for challengers' campaigns to take the majority's vulnerable seats in upcoming elections. One would expect all these kinds of political calculations to influence members' behavior more when majority control of Congress is perceived to be up for grabs.

In the United States, the government-versus-opposition dimension of partisan conflict is obscured by the lack of party responsibility in a complex political system in which confidence is not needed to sustain a government. Nevertheless, although party responsibility is much more diffuse in the US system, it is not entirely lacking, in that one party often has more institutional power and responsibility for outcomes than the other. As such, party politics in the United States to some extent still pits the ins against the outs, as in other democracies. The empirical challenge is teasing out this dimension of partisan conflict from the left-right disputes organized along ideological lines.¹

Scholars have tended to overlook the possibility of this kind of partisan team play in Congress. Prevailing theories of congressional behavior postulate that members engage in sincere spatial voting on the basis of their individual policy preferences. In other words, members are thought to vote for a legislative proposal if they prefer it to the status quo and to vote against if they do not (Krehbiel 1998; McCarty et al. 2006; Poole and Rosenthal 2011).

Spatial theories do not incorporate the incentives minority parties have to strategically withdraw support, force the majority to bear the burdens of governing alone, and exploit dissatisfaction with the majority's performance as ways of regaining power. Even theories that emphasize majority party members' interest in retaining institutional control

still assume that members of the minority party will cast sincere votes. In party cartel models, moderate members of the majority are thought to set aside their policy preferences in order to sustain the majority's agenda control in exchange for side payments and the perks of majority status (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005). But members of the minority party are not expected to engage in a parallel calculus in which they have political incentives to resist the majority's legislative initiatives, even when they might prefer them to the status quo, so as to publicly criticize the majority's performance and force its marginal members to take tough votes. If government-versus-opposition partisanship structures behavior in Congress, members of out parties will systematically withhold legislative cover from in parties for strategic, not simply ideological, reasons. Denying the opposition cross-party support permits a party to clarify differences with the opposition and to use those differences as part of its argument for retaking control.

Spatial theories also generally do not take into account the deliberate staging of roll-call votes for the purposes of partisan public relations. They do not consider how leaders and members may opt to demand recorded votes not to affect policy outcomes but to shape the parties' public images (for an exception, see Groseclose and McCarty 2001). Leaders and members regularly set up roll-call votes in full knowledge that these votes will have no effect on policy outcomes, but they nevertheless stage them for messaging purposes—that is, to define the differences between the parties in hopes of making their party look more attractive to voters or key constituencies than the opposition. To the extent that party competition for institutional control induces more pervasive use of the floor for party position taking, party conflict will become more frequent and party members more in lockstep.

For these reasons, intensified party competition for majority control of Congress may well foster a more parliamentary style of partisanship in Congress. If these types of strategic behavior are more prevalent under conditions of party competition, party conflict would be more frequent in the contemporary Congress than in the 1960s and 1970s, even if the underlying distribution of members' ideological preferences had remained unchanged. In other words, not all party conflict is “polarization” stemming from a widening gap between the two parties' policy preferences. Instead, much party conflict in the contemporary Congress is strategically engineered in the quest for political advantage as the two parties do battle for majority control.

Data and Methods

Because this book focuses on strategic behavior, the inquiry necessarily centers on perceptions. As such, much of the evidence relies upon first-person perspectives. To what extent do members believe their actions might affect their party's fortunes? How important is majority status to them? What is the perceived likelihood that majority control might shift? What strategies and tactics do they believe help build or sustain their party majorities? How do they implement them? What are the constraints they face? Given the centrality of such questions to the book, readers will encounter far more direct quotations than is typical for most works of political science. The book draws upon a wide and diverse array of published material for insight, including from congressional memoirs, historical texts, news coverage, and the *Congressional Record*.

In addition, I conducted interviews with a group of Washington insiders with long experience working in Congress. The subjects were thirty-one current and former high-level staffers for both the House and the Senate, as well as two former House members. The vast majority of the staff interviewed for the project served at the rank of chief of staff, staff director, or its equivalent (88 percent), and the remainder held senior roles, such as press secretary. On average, interviewees had sixteen years of experience working for Congress, with 79 percent having at least a decade of experience. In many cases, subjects had served multiple stints on Capitol Hill, interspersed with years of private-sector lobbying, and 61 percent worked or had worked directly for House or Senate party leaders.

Given the book's focus on competition for majority status, it was important to find interview subjects who had perspective on the institution before Democrats lost their long-standing Senate and House majorities in 1980 and 1994. Of the interview subjects, 24 percent had experience working on the Hill before 1980, and 73 percent had experience before 1994. The interviews were obtained using a snowball selection technique (Esterberg 2002, 93–94). Although some subjects were cold-called, in most cases I asked Hill insiders with whom I was already acquainted for introductions to appropriately experienced staff, and then I would ask interview subjects for additional referrals. In the end, the sample was reasonably representative: 57 percent were Republicans; 42 percent were Democrats; 45 percent had House experience; 55 percent had Senate ex-

perience. For additional information about the interview subjects and process, see appendix A.

These were in-depth, unstructured interviews. Nearly all were an hour in length, and some extended two hours or longer. The interviews were conducted with the understanding that sources would be kept anonymous. Each interview was different in that questions were tailored to the subject's experiences, though the same general themes were pursued. Subjects were queried on topics relating to party messaging and competition for majority control. I asked for explanations of how party messages were constructed and disseminated, how communications and policy staff interact, examples of effective and ineffective messaging campaigns, and how messaging related to legislating. I asked about the importance of majority status to members and how competition for congressional majorities affects interactions between members on legislation. For interview subjects with experience before 1980 and 1994, I sought to ascertain when they believed Democrats might lose control of Congress, what efforts (if any) had been made to either protect or undercut the long-standing Democratic majorities, and how members reacted to changes in majority status after they occurred. Evidence from the interviews is presented throughout the book. Each interviewee was assigned a number, and all quotations are identified by those numbers.

Beyond the first-person perspectives drawn from interviews and other sources, the book assembles a large amount of other data. For information on the scope and intensity of party competition for institutional control over time, there are data on election outcomes, seat divisions in Congress, and party identification in the electorate, as well as data on the incidence and content of news stories raising the possibility of a near-term shift in party control. Historical data on party activity before and after the 1980 elections is presented, including data on fundraising and the frequency of party caucus meetings. Leadership contests are examined for insight into members' preferences about overall party strategy. Congressional staff directories were culled for data on the number and percentage of aides working in party communications roles over time. A dataset of all amendments offered on the Senate floor between 1961 and 2013 was assembled to analyze whether floor amending activity is used more for party messaging purposes in the post-1980 period. A dataset of all House and Senate roll-call votes to raise the debt limit was compiled to shed light on how members handle the trade-offs between messaging and governing over time. Yet another dataset was amassed to examine

the relationship between party competition and legislative party polarization across the states. Readers will encounter a large number of figures and tables in the book, in addition to many direct quotations.

Organization of the Book

Chapter 2 takes stock of variation over time in party competition for institutional control. This analysis has both objective and subjective components. The chapter presents objective data on election outcomes, margins of control in Congress, and partisan identification in the electorate. For insight into politicians' subjective perceptions, I also examine the incidence and content of news stories discussing the likelihood of a shift in party control, as well as what politicians and other close observers said about their party's prospects of winning or losing power during different periods. The chapter argues for the importance of 1980 as a key turning point in the intensification of party competition for control of US national government.

Chapter 3 lays out the argument that increased competition for majority control of Congress gives rise to a more confrontational style of partisanship. Drawing upon the interview subjects consulted for this book, as well as personal memoirs of former members of Congress and perspectives from news sources, the chapter elaborates a logic of partisan confrontation to unpack why members of Congress perceive political benefits from defining and dramatizing party differences. I examine how these party messaging efforts are implemented and how they disrupt bipartisan collaboration. Finally, the chapter analyzes how a party's incentives to engage in strategies of partisan differentiation are shaped by its institutional position in the constitutional system.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed history of how the minority parties in Congress reacted to the changed competitive circumstances after 1980. The seemingly permanent Democratic majorities before 1980 incentivized more "loyal opposition" behavior on the part of the minority party. Republicans and Democrats frequently collaborated on committees. Their apparently invulnerable majorities made Democrats complacent, and they rarely met in caucus and raised almost no party campaign funds. After 1980, a sharper style of partisanship began to emerge among both minority-party Democrats in the Senate and Republicans in the House. Senate Democrats and House Republicans began to meet

more frequently. The minority parties in both the House and the Senate started looking for more ways to create partisan distinctions, publicize partisan controversies, raise campaign money, and make an argument for their party to retake control.

Chapter 5 examines how the parties in Congress have developed and professionalized their messaging capabilities after the reemergence of party competition for institutional control in 1980. The contemporary legislative branch now employs a large workforce of professional partisan communicators. This chapter sheds light on how party messages are constructed and disseminated. It provides a content analysis of the types of messages the parties broadcast. It also examines how the institutionalization of party messaging has affected power hierarchies inside the legislative branch and sparked rivalries between staff focused on policy and those focused on communications.

Chapter 6 examines how members and leaders set up recorded votes to drive party messages. The strategy and tactics involved are detailed, drawing upon perspectives from interviews and other sources. The chapter then presents an analysis of amendments that receive recorded votes on the Senate floor, one of the most frequent ways message votes are staged. Through an examination of floor amendments receiving roll-call votes in the Senate between 1959 and 2013, the chapter offers evidence that senators in the post-1980 period employ floor votes for purposes of partisan communications more often than did senators of the 1960s and 1970s.

Chapter 7 (coauthored with Timothy L. Cordova) uses votes to raise the debt limit to shed light on how parties weigh the trade-offs between messaging and legislating under conditions of competition for majority control. Even though raising the debt ceiling is something neither liberals nor conservatives ever want to be responsible for, the congressional politics of these measures is highly partisan, with members' willingness to support raising the debt limit heavily influenced by their party's institutional position. The more power members' parties have, the more willing they are to vote in favor of increasing the debt ceiling. Meanwhile, parties with less power exploit debt-ceiling votes for messaging purposes. The chapter presents evidence that government-versus-opposition conflict on the debt limit is sharper after 1980.

Chapter 8 (coauthored with Kelsey L. Hinchliffe) examines whether there is more legislative party conflict in more two-party-competitive states. Five different measures of party competition are employed.

Drawing upon new data on state legislative party polarization (Shor 2014; Shor and McCarty 2011), we show that all five measures of competition are associated with higher levels of party polarization in the lower chambers of state legislatures, and most are associated with party polarization in the upper chambers. No measure of party competition is associated with lower levels of polarization in either chamber.

Chapter 9 concludes with some reflections on the larger significance of the book's argument for both scholarship on Congress and the functioning of the US constitutional system.