

## **Congress – Representation and Institutionalization**

I decided to focus on two of the selections we read and how I think their analyses are complementary. Miller and Stokes identified three mechanisms for how House member behavior with regard to their constituencies: acting as a Burkean representation of constituency interest, rather than constituency will; towing the line of a responsible party; and serving as an instructed delegate, guided by constituency opinion. Not surprisingly, the authors found that issue salience and the knowledge and understanding voters had of issues made a difference in what type of behavior the House members assumed. For issues such as civil rights, where voters understood the issues and found them to be highly salient, Miller and Stokes found that representatives were well aware of their district's sentiments and that this awareness was "preeminently important" in predicting roll call votes. On other issues, such as foreign affairs, where the public is less well-informed, Congressmen tend to look to other sources to guide their votes. In particular, Miller and Stokes saw Congressmen looking for guidance from the executive branch.

This idea—that congressional behavior varies across issues—is one that, in my mind, dovetailed nicely with Mayhew's analysis of credit claiming and position taking, as well as their level of interest in mobilizing their colleagues. Mayhew did not spend much time analyzing behavior with regard to specific issues, with the exception of how these issues related to the various committees, such as the chaos associated with issues overseen by the Education and Labor committee. However, it seems as though the salience of issue areas amongst the public likely guides whether and how a congressman will try to take credit or stake a position. For example, one of Miller and Stokes foreign policy issues, aid to neutral countries, probably would not inspire many congressmen to claim credit, as there is no easily conveyable positive outcome; to take a position, as most people probably do not know of (or care about) our plans for neutral country foreign aid; or mobilize others, as, again, there is no clear electoral benefit on this issue. Another issue raised in Miller and Stokes analysis, public housing, would likely lead to different behavior by congressmen. They might claim credit for keeping a public housing project out of a downtown area, but could also simultaneously take a position in favor of affordable housing.

In short, I feel like there may be empirically-testable patterns for how congressmen use the different strategies identified by Mayhew in advancing their electoral prospects.

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17.202 Graduate Seminar in American Politics II  
Spring 2010

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