

Chapter Thirteen

Congress

The Evolution of Congress

- The intent of the Framers:
 - To oppose the concentration of power in a single institution
 - To balance large and small states
 - Bicameralism
- They expected Congress to be the dominant institution

Organization of the House

- Historically, power struggles have occurred between members and leadership
- 1994 brought changes:
 - Committee chairs hold positions for only 6 years

Organization of the House

- Reduced the number of committees and subcommittees
- The Speaker dominated the selection of committee chairs
- The Speaker set the agenda (Contract with America) and sustained high Republican discipline in 1995

Evolution of the Senate

- The Senate escaped many of the tensions encountered by the House
- The major struggle in the Senate was about how its members should be chosen; 17th amendment (1913)
- The filibuster is another major issue: restricted by Rule 22 (1917), which allows a vote of cloture

Who is in Congress?

- The House has become less male and less white
- Membership in Congress became a career
- Incumbents still have a great electoral advantage
- But in 1994, voters opposed incumbents due to budget deficits, various policies, legislative-executive bickering, and scandal

Table 13.1: Blacks, Hispanics, and Women in Congress, 1971-2002

Table 13.1 Blacks, Hispanics, and Women in Congress, 1971–2006

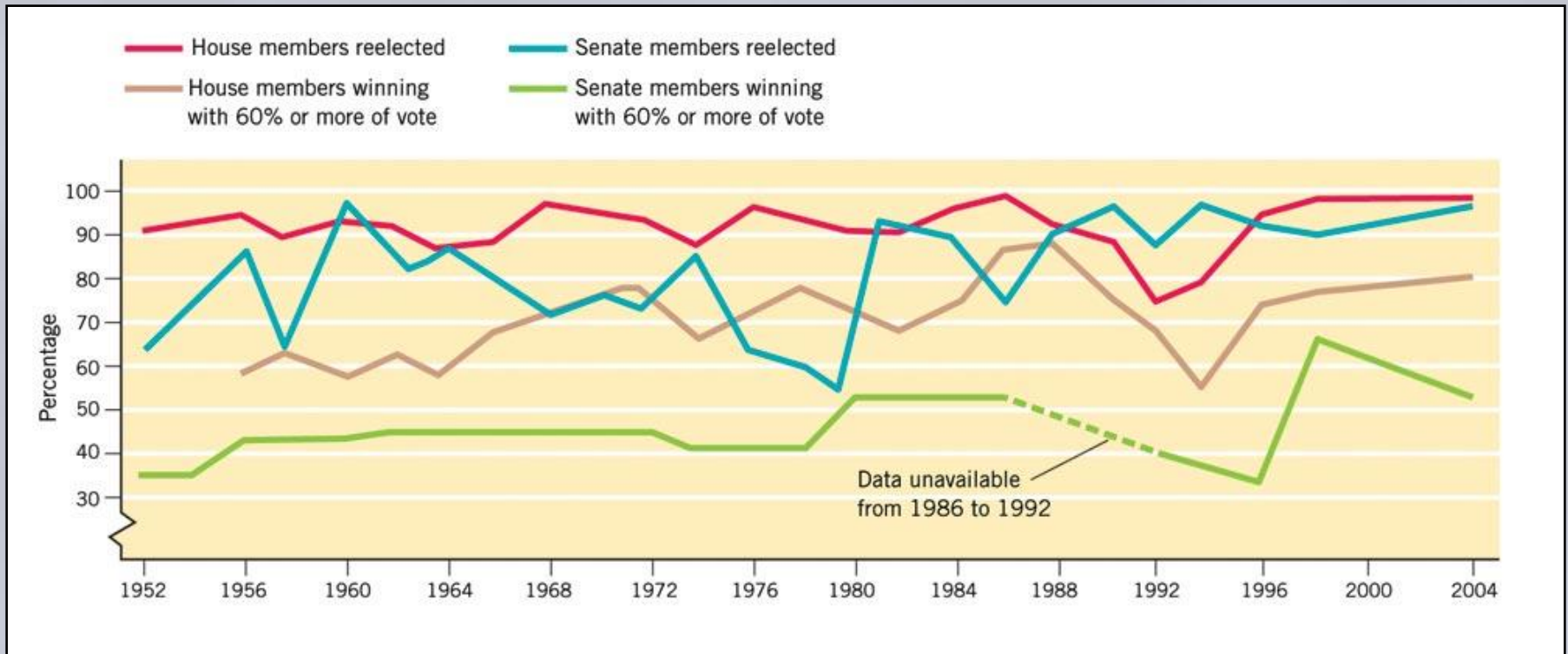
Congress	Senate			House		
	Blacks	Hispanics	Women	Blacks	Hispanics	Women
109th (2005–2006)	1	0	14	37	23	59
108th	0	0	13	39	23	62
107th	0	0	13	36	19	59
106th	0	0	9	39	19	58
105th	1	1	9	37	18	51
104th	1	0	8	38	18	48
103rd	1	0	6	38	17	47
102nd	0	0	2	26	10	29
101st	0	0	2	24	11	25
100th	0	0	2	23	11	23
99th	0	0	2	20	11	22
98th	0	0	2	21	10	22
97th	0	0	2	17	6	19
96th	0	0	1	16	6	16
95th	1	0	2	16	5	18
94th	1	1	0	15	5	19
93rd	1	1	0	15	5	14
92nd (1971–1972)	1	1	2	12	5	13

Source: *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, various years.

The Incumbency Advantage

- Media coverage is higher for incumbents
- Incumbents have greater name recognition due to franking, travel to the district, news coverage
- Members secure policies and programs for voters

Figure 13.2: Percentage of Incumbents Reelected to Congress



Harold W. Stanley and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics*, 1999-2000 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000), table 1-18; 2004 updated by Marc Siegal.

Member Behavior

- **Representational view:** members vote to please their constituents, in order to secure re-election
- **Organizational view:** where constituency interests are not vitally at stake, members primarily respond to cues from colleagues
- **Attitudinal view:** the member's ideology determines her/his vote

Party Structure in the Senate

- President pro tempore presides; this is the member with most seniority in majority party (a largely honorific office)
- Leaders are the majority leader and the minority leader, elected by their respective party members

Party Structure in the Senate

- Party whips: keep leaders informed, round up votes, count noses
- Each party has a policy committee: schedules Senate business, prioritizes bills
- Committee assignments are handled by a group of Senators, each for their own party

Party Structure in the House

- Speaker of the House is leader of majority party and presides over House
- Majority leader and minority leader: leaders on the floor
- Party whips keep leaders informed and round up votes
- Committee assignments and legislative schedule are set by each party

Congressional Caucuses

- **Caucus:** an association of members of Congress created to advocate a political ideology or a regional or economic interest
- **Intra-party caucuses:** members share a similar ideology
- **Personal interest caucuses:** members share an interest in an issue
- **Constituency caucuses:** established to represent groups, regions or both

Committees

- Committees are the most important organizational feature of Congress
- Consider bills or legislative proposals
- Maintain oversight of executive agencies
- Conduct investigations

Types of Committees

- **Standing committees:** basically permanent bodies with specified legislative responsibilities
- **Select committees:** groups appointed for a limited purpose and limited duration

Types of Committees

- **Joint committees:** those on which both representatives and senators serve
- **Conference committee:** a joint committee appointed to resolve differences in Senate and House versions of the same piece of legislation before final passage

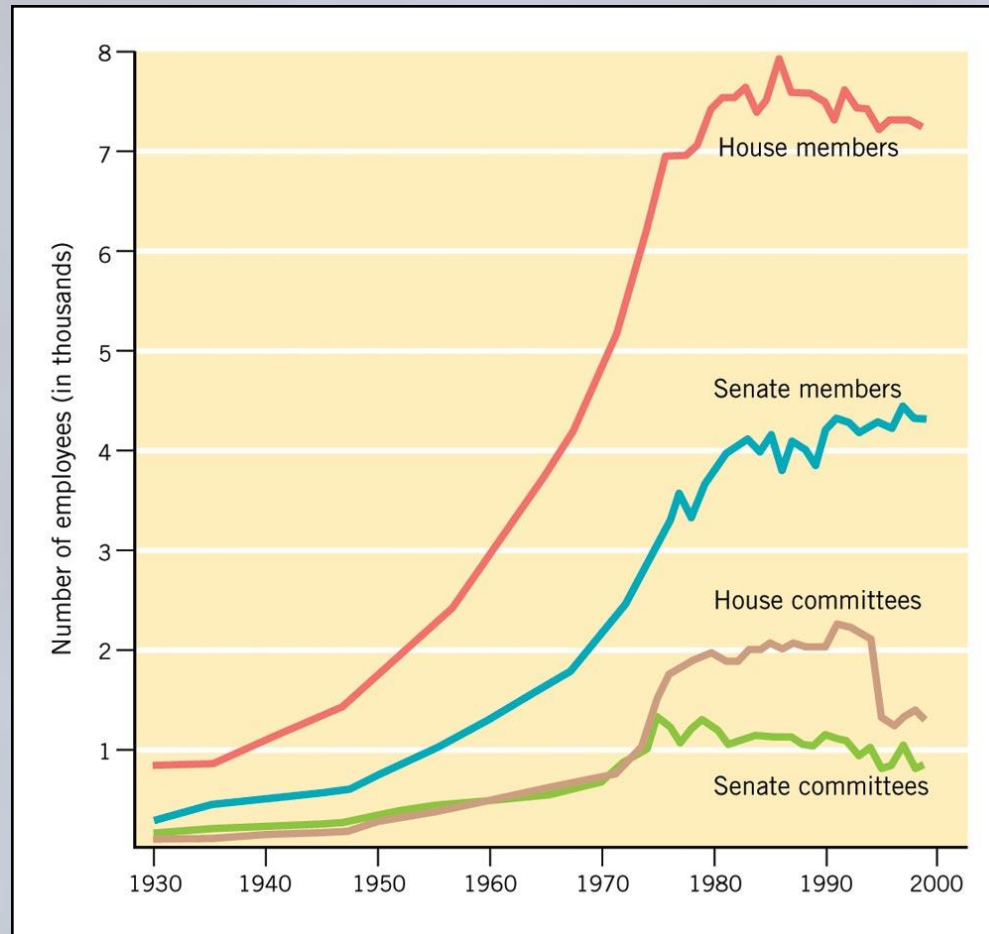
Committee Practices

- The number of committees has varied; significant cuts in number of House committees in 1995, and in the number of House and Senate subcommittees
- Majority party has majority of seats on the committees and names the chair

Congressional Staff

- Constituency service is a major task of members' staff
- Legislative functions of staff include devising proposals, negotiating agreements, organizing hearings, and meeting with lobbyists and administrators
- Members' staff consider themselves advocates of their employers

Figure 13.4: The Growth in Staffs of Members and Committees in Congress, 1930-2000



How a Bill Becomes a Law

- Bill must be introduced by a member of Congress
- Bill is referred to a committee for consideration by either Speaker or presiding officer of the Senate
- Revenue bills must originate in the House
- Most bills die in committee

How a Bill Becomes a Law

- After hearings and mark-up sessions, the committee reports a bill out to the House or Senate
- Bill must be placed on a calendar to come for a vote before either house
- House Rules Committee sets the rules for consideration

How a Bill Becomes a Law

- Bills are debated on the floor of the House or Senate
- If there are major differences in the bill as passed by the House and Senate, a conference committee is appointed
- The bill goes to the president

How a Bill Becomes Law

- The president may sign it
- If the president vetoes it, it returns to house of origin
- Both houses must support the bill, with a two-thirds vote, in order to override the president's veto

Post 9-11 Congress

- 9-11 Commission recommended Congress make fundamental changes in how it oversees agencies involved in intelligence-gathering and counter-terrorism
- Congress passed some of those proposals after some opposition in both parties