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# Congress: The Electoral Connection, Second Edition



## Synopsis

In this second edition to a book that has now achieved canonical status, David R. Mayhew argues that the principal motivation of legislators is reelection and that the pursuit of this goal affects the way they behave and the way that they make public policy. In a new foreword for this edition, R. Douglas Arnold discusses why the book revolutionized the study of Congress and how it has stood the test of time. The book also contains a new preface by the author.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Any short list of major analyses of Congress must of necessity include David Mayhew's Congress: The Electoral Connection. It is a pleasure to have this aged-in-the cask classic reissued, and the foreword by Arnold and preface by Mayhew are a valuable bonus." — Fred Greenstein

"Mayhew's book on Congress seems to be the best thing on the subject. The interpretation, based as it is on an extraordinary range and depth of scholarship, will compel everyone who writes on Congress in the future in serious fashion - including serious-minded journalists - to take it into account. It simply couldn't be ignored." — Robert A. Dahl

"A classic in legislative studies." — Richard F. Fenno, Jr.

David R. Mayhew, Sterling Professor of Political Science at Yale University, is the author of many books, including *Divided We Govern*, *America's Congress*, and *Electoral Realignments*, all published by Yale University Press.

I was looking for a book about Congress & how elections play a role in their decision making (or lack thereof). This book is about Congress & how elections play a role in their decision making (or lack thereof). I think I may have succeeded.

Book was needed for Poly Sci class on Congress. It was a very good and informative read on how American legislature works. Would recommend as an easy read for anyone taking a class on congress or interested in reading up on how Congress functions.

I would recommend this product to others because it was a very interesting read so far and helps you to learn more

Great

I had to read this book for my political science class and it was very informative on what drives politicians to seek and retain office. However, the language was hard to understand and I was highly bored reading this.

Forget everything you learned in High School civics. David Mayhew utterly demolishes the idea that legislators are engaged in some high-minded pursuit of the "public interest," partisan ideological struggle, or that policies are adopted based on facts or reason. The message of this thoroughly convincing but highly readable tome is that politicians, like the rest of us, pursue their own self interest. That interest is entirely dictated by the determination to get reelected at all costs. Positions are taken, votes are cast, and gestures are made with that first and foremost in mind. What does that mean? It means that well organized groups of voters (the much maligned but rarely understood "special interest groups") dictate policy. Our founding fathers called these groups "factions" and believed that they were the biggest threat to self government. They were right. Organized groups of politically active voters call the shots, and their agendas rarely comport with the public interest. Mayhew simply calls it as he sees it. He draws no conclusions, but they should be self evident to the reader. To understand democratic government, one must understand politics. And to understand politics, one simply must read Mayhew. The book is also relevant beyond the realm of theory. Mayhew casts serious doubt upon the conventional belief that campaign finance reform, term limits, or a host of other proposed reforms will control the power of these factions. I've working

in the public policy world in Washington for over a decade, and everything Mayhew argues comports well with my experience in dealing with elected officials and their staff members. The bitter truth is that neither facts, data, nor reasoned analysis has anything to do with public policy in America. Even if you disagree with Mayhew, you can't have an informed opinion about politics without grappling with the arguments in this book. "Congress: The Electoral Connection" is considered by political scientists to be one of the most important books published within their discipline in the past 30 years. They're right; it is an absolute classic and a must read!

David Mayhew's *Congress: The Electoral Connection* examines the activities of the individuals and the specifics of the institutions of the US House of Representatives, in an effort to determine the primary goals of House members elected to serve America and their constituents in the House. The thinking is that understanding House members' motivations better will allow observers to predict their actions. He's well qualified to address this topic, having taught at Yale on political and legislative institutions since 1968. Mayhew concludes that the main motivation behind what United States Congressmen say and do is not the best interests of the folks back home or even the well-being of their country - they are mainly concerned with their own reelection. In fact, he goes further, dismissing the idea that reelection is one of many motivations of Congressmen, saying that they are "...indeed, in their role [in Washington] as abstractions, interested in nothing else." He goes on in this book to display evidence, in the name of activities of Congresspeople and the policies and institutions of the House of Representatives, that supports his thesis well. Don't be dismissed by the book's brevity and breezy tone. It's packed with insight and supportive data. And, don't think that this 1974 book is irrelevant to today's Congress. The themes and pressures ring true to today's world. The conclusions are disheartening to those of us hoping for more from our elected leaders, but Mayhew's tone isn't cynical, just factual. *Congress: The Electoral Connection* is a foundation on which a library of research has been conducted on US political institutions. Political science students and those interested in how the direction of our country is set should read it.

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