

In recent decades, political scientists have produced an enormous body of scholarship dealing with the U.S. Congress, and in particular congressional organization. However, most of this research has focused on Congress in the twentieth century—especially the post-New Deal era—and the long history of Congress has been largely neglected. The contributors to this book demonstrate that this inattention to congressional history has denied us many rich opportunities to more fully understand the evolution and functioning of the modern Congress. In striking contrast to the modern era, which is marked by only modest partisan realignment and institutional change, the period preceding the New Deal was a time of rapid and substantial change in Congress. During the nation's first 150 years, parties emerged, developed, and realigned; the standing rules of the House and Senate expanded and underwent profound changes; the workload of Congress increased dramatically; and both houses grew considerably in size. Studying history is valuable in large part because it allows scholars to observe greater variation in many of the parameters of their theories, and to test their core assumptions. A historical approach pushes scholars to recognize and confront the limits of their theories, resulting in theories that have increased validity and broader applicability. Thus, incorporating history into political science gives us a more dynamic view of Congress than the relatively static picture that emerges from a strict focus on recent periods. Each contributor engages one of three general questions that have animated the literature on congressional politics in recent years: What is the role of party organizations in policy making? In what ways have congressional process and procedure changed over the years? How does congressional process and procedure affect congressional politics and policy?

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