overwhelmingly partisan affair. In terms of both campaign efforts and voting patterns, partisanship was key. This comes through most clearly in the unified Whig effort to elect Harrison but is clear in the Democrats' efforts for Van Buren as well. Second, far from sitting by silently and allowing surrogates to make their cases to the voters both Harrison and Van Buren proactively took their arguments to the people and did so quite substantively. While they did so in very different ways—Harrison through large public speeches and Van Buren using public letters—both candidates actively and personally courted voters and did so in a manner that was heavy on public policy. Third, and according to Ellis the most important factor in the outcome of the 1840 presidential contest, this election demonstrated for the first time the power of the economy in shaping presidential election results. Van Buren simply could not overcome the poor economy in place during his reelection campaign. Future incumbents have learned this lesson as well. These critical developments both refute many of the common conceptions of the 1840 campaign and once again demonstrate the critical linkage of the 1840 contest to the presidential campaigns of the modern era.

These are just the primary threads that run through this excellent book. Readers will find far more of interest as well, such as the place of slavery in the party politics of the 1830s and 1840s, the significance of using open party conventions to nominate candidates, the implications of the lack of a national election day in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and the importance of Henry Clay in many different areas. This book is superbly researched and very well written. It is also highly accessible and will be a valuable read for all audiences from the educated layperson to the scholar with decades of experience in the area. My one complaint is that the text focuses far more on the Whigs and Harrison than it does on Van Buren and the Democrats. Readers are informed that this will be the case in both the Editor's Foreword and by Ellis, but I still would have liked a bit more on the man who is often credited with the creation of modern American political parties. But this is a minor quibble with an excellent piece of work.

Throughout the book Ellis often notes how similar American politics of the 1830s is to the politics of our own time. Party leaders and politicians on both sides of the aisle fervently believe that the very future of the republic rests on the outcome of the next election. As such, these same leaders are not above using propaganda in support of their cause. We even have the losing presidential candidate in 1840 chalking his loss up to widespread voter fraud, as Van Buren couldn't come up with any other plausible explanation for his defeat. But these similarities can also cause a reader to ponder what is different about our political moment. For me, one key difference is the ubiquitous presence of social media in our time. Nineteenth-century American politics had no equivalent. If other readers' thoughts go in a similar direction, I'll leave it to them to render judgment on whether this is a good thing.

Congress Overwhelmed: The Decline in Congressional Capacity and Prospects for Reform. Edited by Timothy M. LaPira, Lee Drutman, and Kevin R. Kosar. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. 352p. $105.00 cloth, $35.00 paper.
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— Kevin M. Esterling, *University of California, Riverside*
kevin.esterling@ucr.edu

Understanding the scope, causes, and consequences of the state's *capacity* to solve public problems is central to the study of American institutions. This literature is largely centered on the bureaucracy. For example, in Daniel Carpenter's (2001) *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*, executive agencies develop administrative capacity by cultivating a reputation for expertise among career officials who possess a complex set of ties to varied external stakeholders. In Martha Derthick's (1979) *Policymaking for Social Security,* civil servants develop autonomy to advance programmatic goals by exploiting arcane, research-based knowledge of how a program functions.

Congress Overwhelmed, edited by Timothy LaPira, Lee Drutman, and Kevin Kosar, is a collection of essays that together represent a major undertaking to situate the study of capacity within the Congress literature. The volume documents Congress's capacity and how it changes over time, and offers recommendations for reform. The essays share a common motivation that congressional disfunction is not only due to partisan divisiveness but also to the decline in collective knowledge and competence in the institution.

While there are notable works in the field of American political development that consider the capacity of Congress, notably Eric Schickler's (2001) *Disjointed Pluralism* and Bruce Bimber's (1996) *The Politics of Expertise in Congress,* the study of this kind of state capacity has nowhere near the central role in the study of Congress as it has in the study of the bureaucracy. This is likely for at least two reasons. First, agencies have Weberian-like functional specialization and expertise, while legislatures are by necessity generalist. And second, notions of representation in democratic theory center on the representatives, and generally do not envision a democratic role for the staff who serve them. Nonetheless, Congress simply could not function without the expertise and creativity provided by civil servants in its own organization. The House and Senate have dozens of standing committees, hundreds of member offices, three support agencies, a dozen administrative offices, and tens of thousands of employees that do the day-to-day work to enable lawmaking, oversight, and constituent service activities that are core legislative functions.

In their introductory chapter to the volume, the editors define *congressional capacity* as "the organizational

resources, knowledge, expertise, time, space, and technology that are necessary for Congress to perform its constitutional role" (p. 1). Drutman and LaPira (chapt. 2) next develop a theoretical framework of "capacity regimes" to frame the empirical work that follows. Capacity regimes are defined over two dimensions of variation: the degree of organizational centralization and the degree to which the institution invests in staff resources to solve complex problems rather than simple routine tasks. Although the authors argue that regimes under each of these combinations have normative merit, they also note that the allocation of resources to address complex problem solving over simple task completion enhances congressional capacity irrespective of the degree of centralization or decentralization. This framework lends organization to the remaining chapters and foreshadows recurrent themes.

The next set of chapters documents the recent decline in knowledge and competence within the institution. Molly Reynolds (chapt. 3), examines changes over time in the correlates of capacity, showing that Congress has disinvested in its own capacity since the 1980s, and in particular after the 1994 Republican "Contract with America." She also documents a shift in staff members at both the leadership and rank-and-file levels away from legislative staff toward communications staff, investing resources in staff that help to sell legislation to the public rather than write it in the first place. Philip Wallach (chapt. 4) documents Congress's difficulties in keeping pace with expanded capacity in the executive branch in the postwar period.

The book also takes a deep dive into empirical descriptions of staff and their role in enhancing capacity. Alexander Furnas and Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, along with Drutman, LaPira, and Kosar, (chapt. 5) summarize core findings from the Congressional Capacity Survey (CCS), administered in 2017. They document the long hours, limited bandwidth, and low pay that staff endure, and that most don't aspire to make service in Congress a career. Kristina Miler (chapt. 6) uses the CCS to examine the levels and variation in what staff know about procedure and substantive policy. Casey Burgat and Charles Hunt (chapt. 7) show that increasing policy staff support in a committee increases the number of important pieces of legislation the committee reports. Jesse Crosson, Geoffrey Lorenz, Craig Volden, and Alan Wiseman (chapt. 13) document the importance of having experienced staff for members' legislative effectiveness, especially for committee chairs and for new members who often have a steep learning curve.

Other chapters document changes to the organizational structure within Congress and diagnose how that structure affects capacity. In the postwar period, Congress streamlined the committee structure and invested in legislative support agencies to help generalist legislators and staff understand complex policy issues, and to reduce the legislature's dependence on advice from the executive branch and lobbyists. Jonathan Lewallen, Sean Theriault, and Bryan Jones (chapt. 11) document the recent decline, however, in the number and quality of committee hearings, which reduces the scope and volume of information available to members. Kevin Kosar (chapt. 8) describes how Congress has disinvested in its own support agencies.

James Curry and Frances Lee (chapt. 14) argue that this decline of decentralized authority of committees is not necessarily to blame for the decline of congressional capacity, but instead is an adaptation to maintain lawmaking capacity in an era of deep partisan conflict. Leadership-driven, centralized processes confer advantages of secrecy, efficiency, and flexibility that enable Congress to do its work in the current legislative environment. Likewise, Peter Hanson (chapt. 9) documents the increase in omnibus appropriations bills as an effective instrument to ensure passage, even though the dominance of party leadership has led to a hollowing out of committees' capacity to gather information and deliberate over spending.

Scott Adler, Stefani Langehennig, and Ryan Bell (chapt. 12) find that partisan divisiveness and the sheer size of the workload in an issue area has diminished Congress's ability to effectively use short-term authorizations to monitor and control agencies. Laurel Harbridge-Yong (chapt. 15) shows that decreases in committee staff and increases in investment in communications staff reduce the capacity for collaboration across party divides. James Wallner (chapt. 10) argues that disfunction in the Senate stems from senators' own willingness to acquiescence to disfunction.

Many of the authors in this volume are active in advising Congress on ideas for reforms to improve capacity. The concluding chapters offer a road map for this effort. Ruth Bloch Rubin (chapt. 16) calls attention to challenges given incentives among members created by the status quo. Anthony Madonna and Ian Ostrander (chapt. 17) argue that members' current practice of running against Congress is not as effective as an electoral strategy as party leaders often think.

This volume should help advance current reform efforts, due both to the findings it reports and to the extent it succeeds in making capacity a core area of research for Congress scholars going forward.

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— Hye Young You, *New York University*
hy21@nyu.edu

Lamentation about the declining power of labor unions in the United States frequently appears when the problem of