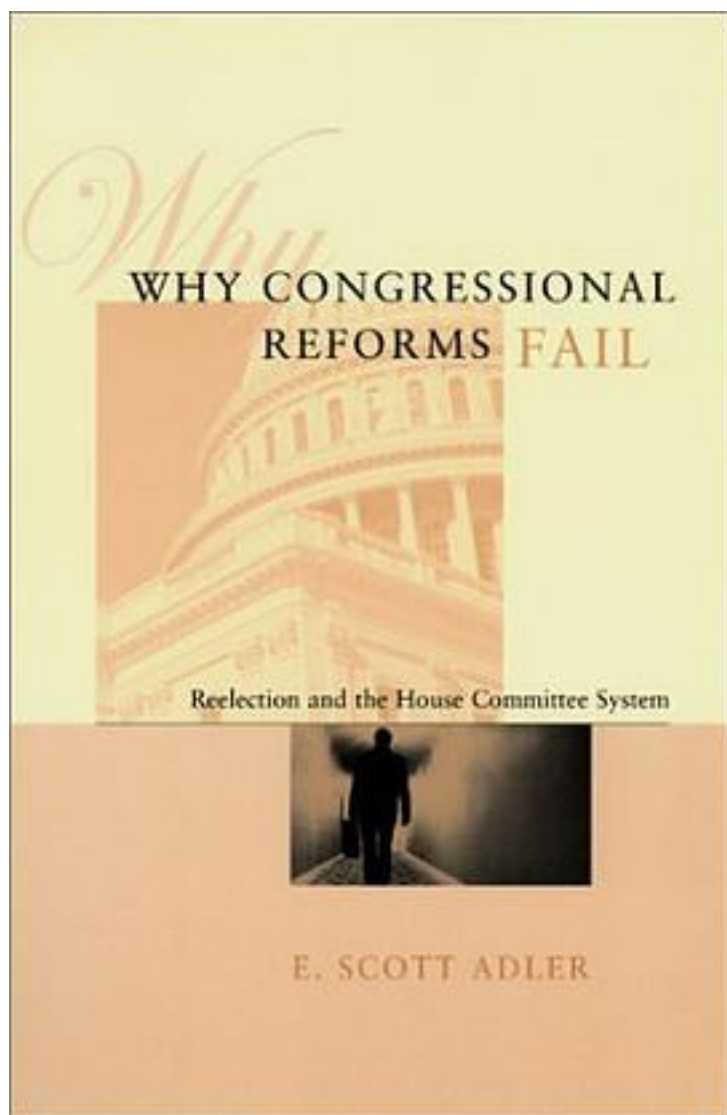


Why Congressional Reforms Fail



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For decades, advocates of congressional reforms have repeatedly attempted to clean up the House committee system, which has been called inefficient, outmoded, unaccountable, and even corrupt. Yet these efforts result in little if any change, as members of Congress who are generally satisfied with existing institutions repeatedly obstruct what could fairly be called innocuous reforms. What lies behind the House's resistance to change? Challenging recent explanations of this phenomenon, Scott Adler contends that legislators resist rearranging committee powers and jurisdictions for the same reason they cling to the current House structure - the ambition for reelection. The system's structure works to the members' advantage, helping them obtain funding (and favor) in their districts. Using extensive evidence from three major reform periods - the 1940s, 1970s, and 1990s - Adler shows that the reelection motive is still the most important underlying factor in determining the outcome of committee reforms, and he explains why committee reform in the House has never succeeded and probably never will.

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