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AN EXPLANATION OF COMMITTEE BEHAVIOR IN THE US HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses a fundamental question in Congressional politics, why some bills succeed where others fail. Previous work examines the committee stage as a single step in a larger legislative process. This approach, however, breaks a bill's time in committee into three phases: action taken (was there a committee hearing or markup session), committee vote (did a vote occur), and committee report (was the bill issued to the House floor). The existing literature on what factors motivate lawmakers centers on the distributional, partisan, and informational models. My theory expands on previous research by combining variables from all three models to form a more complete picture of what issues cause legislators to act. Utilizing a logistic regression technique to analyze more than 5,000 bills over the past 18 years, I find that no single theory has variables that prove to be significant at every phase; however, all three models show significance at the stage of whether or not action is taken on a specific bill. This first hurdle in the committee process acts as a gatekeeping phase for the rest of a bill's time in committee. Once action is taken, a bill is much more likely to receive a vote by the full committee and to be reported to the floor. These findings demonstrate that the committee process is more nuanced than previously shown and that all three of the major theories appear to have some impact on a bill's passage through committee.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On October 1, 2013 the United States Congress failed to create a budget that would keep the government running for the first time in nearly twenty years. The inability of Congress to reach agreement resulted in a seventeen day government shutdown that cost the United States 2-6 billion dollars in GDP and was only resolved by the threat of default on American debt (Office of Management and Budget 2013). There are several explanations why Congress reaches compromise at some times and fails to do so at others, yet no single model has emerged that encompasses all of the apparently relevant factors that affect the decisions of legislators. Additionally, little work has been done that applies these ideas to committees, the smaller bodies that are responsible for a great deal of legislative work. This paper examines the United States House of Representatives at the committee level to see if an alternative model can be created to explain why some bills move through the Congressional process and others don't. I offer an analysis of the existing literature on committee behavior, explain my theory, design and test a model that determines the likelihood that a bill will make it through each step of the committee process, and discuss my findings.

At the core of this issue is a principle-agent relationship that exists within the House (and Senate). The 435 voting members of the House cannot be familiar with every area of policy that requires their attention. As such, the House calls upon committees to become familiar with specific issues, to do the legal research, and to create basic compromises before bringing matters to the floor (Shepsle and Weingast 1987). Just as the American people rely on Congress to pass laws to govern the land, the House itself relies on committees to draft legislation to be considered by the entire body. Both of these principle-agent relationships solve problems of

collective action, yet both require the larger group to trust that the smaller will do its job. This paper provides an answer to the question of why some bills move through the different phases of the committee process and others do not. By examining these stages, a better understanding of the factors that are most important to the functioning of committees, and in turn the House, is possible.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Most of the literature on Congressional behavior overlooks the crucial committee stage. In order to understand how committees act, it is necessary to begin with an explanation of the actions of individual legislators. If committees are seen as an amalgamation of the preferences of each lawmaker, this will provide an understanding of how they reach decisions. In the following section I provide a discussion of the three main theories of legislative behavior (the distributional, partisan, informational models) and the initial attempts that have been made to combine aspects of these models.

Distributional Model

In 1974, David Mayhew published one of the seminal books on Congressional behavior, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. This influential work forms the basis of the distributional model for Congressional behavior by positing that lawmakers, as rational actors, care primarily about getting reelected (Mayhew 2004). The theory looks at politicians through the scope of reelection and identifies three activities that members engage in to gain their constituents'

support; advertising, credit claiming, and position taking. Several potential variables are identified in this work such as the specific member(s) sponsoring a bill, the policy area of the legislation, roll call votes in the full chamber, and a variety of demographic features of both the members' districts and the members themselves (Mayhew 2004).

Other works apply similar models to certain aspects of Congress. The effect that rationally motivated legislators would have on forming coalitions is an excellent example. In cases of both large and small legislative coalitions, reelection oriented motivations spur action (Weingast 1979). Similar work evaluates whether aspects of the distributional model matter in the formation of compromises between lawmakers. In cases where direct benefits for a member's district are available, lawmakers are more likely to form coalitions to pass legislation (Clark and Riis 2008).

Partisan Model

An alternative explanation exists to explain Congressional behavior, the partisan model. This theory looks beyond individual members to their political parties. Instead of attributing legislators' actions to self-interest, it argues that politicians form parties in order to solve the inherent collective action problems of lawmaking. Individual members make sacrifices in order to gain the benefits of party membership which include ready-made legislative coalitions and campaign support (Cox and McCubbins 1993). In this scenario, the most important factors in determining which bills move through committee relate to the balance of power between the

parties. Gridlock occurs when Congress is divided and legislation moves more smoothly under a unified government.

The importance of the party receives a great deal of attention in the literature. Research shows that when the majority party holds a slim advantage over the minority, it attempts to “stack” committees with its members in order to increase its influence on the floor (Hedlund et al. 2009). This means that the majority size on the floor determines the number of seats assigned to each party in a committee. It also implies that a more evenly divided committee signifies a larger majority of one party in the House and smoother passage for the bills said party supports. Additional support for the partisan model is seen in an exploration of the ideological breakdown of the House. Research shows that the ideological position of the median voter in the House was more similar to the median voter of the majority party (Wiseman and Wright 2008). One expects votes to occur based upon party breakdown because the party does, in fact, do the best job at serving the ideological needs of the average voter.

The partisan model is not without criticism. Shickler and Rich (1997) look at the ideology of lawmakers and find that the House tends to favor cross-party coalitions. Also these coalitions are built along ideological lines that do not always align with party affiliation. Although this argument can be reconciled with the party model of Wiseman and Wright (2008), it raises doubts that parties themselves are the root factor in Congressional support for individual bills. Additionally, the size of the majority and Congressional institutions are theorized to be the most important factors in determining a piece of legislation’s passage in the House (Krehbiel 1996).

A more direct challenge to the partisan theory comes from David Mayhew, the founder of the distributional model. Mayhew (1991) posits that strong party control is not a necessary factor

for the passage of public policy. He asserts that a divided or unified government is secondary to other variables and points to the importance of timing (more laws tend to be passed in the earlier years of a presidency) and public mood (Congress acts when the public demands it does so). Mayhew attributes these factors to legislators' desires to further their own political careers (1991).

This criticism of the partisan theory has sparked further debate in the academic community. Mayhew's (1991) assertion that divided government has no effect on the creation of "innovative laws" is at the center of some criticism. By changing the way such a law is defined, party control of the government does play a role in the passage of statutes (Kelly 1993). Additionally, by changing the time frame examined by Mayhew, research shows that divided government impacted the amount of "important legislation" passed in the postwar years (Coleman 1999). However, these articles, along with Mayhew's criticism, open the Pandora's Box of just what exactly is an innovative or important law. Even the most refined methods of addressing legislative impact are inherently subjective.

Another idea posits that it is conflict within the Congress and not between Congress and other branches that causes divided governments to be less productive (Binder 1999). This work points to several interesting variables such as the cohesiveness of ideological preferences within a chamber, political polarization, public support for Congress, and the size of the federal debt at the time of legislation (Binder 1999). Such an argument does not necessarily support the partisan model over the distributional model, but purports that both theories may be too general to capture all of the factors at work.

Informational Model

In the midst of this debate, a third theory explaining legislative behavior emerges. Keith Krehbiel lays the groundwork for the informational model. While agreeing that gridlock is not determined by divided or unified government, Krehbiel (1998) argues that government dysfunction results from the interplay between institutions and several key “pivotal” players such as the President, the Speaker of the House, and committee chairs. In the face of the partisan model, he also points out that bills are frequently passed with large, bi-partisan supermajorities (Krehbiel 1998). This theory differs from the distributional model because it is concerned with the personal preferences of specific politicians rather than the cumulative effect of all legislators’ self-motivations.

Again, this theory has its share of supporters. Committees serve the larger chamber by providing information and doing the early work of legislating. This power that committees hold is tied to the preferences of the committee chair (Epstein 1997). Further inspection of committees demonstrates that they are the main originators of legislation in Congress and also that conference committees provide a second opportunity for pivotal players to have a role in shaping the path of legislation (Shepsle and Weingast 1987). There is general agreement that committees play an important role in the pivotal model (Krehbiel, Shepsle, and Weingast 1987). More support is lent to the theory when looking specifically at the climate legislation of the 110th Congress. The renewable energy tax credits legislation was held up by several influential coal-state Republicans (Skodvin 2010).

Attempting to Combine Models

There are many who see substantial overlap between these theories and some research combines variables from at least two of these models. Chiou and Rothenberg (2003) examine gridlock from both a partisan and informational perspective. They find that neither partisan control nor influential members can solely account for Congressional inaction. They surmise that both factors play some role (Chiou and Rothenberg 2003).

Other work examines combinations of the distributional and pivotal models. A study finds that while the institutions of Congress set the stage for bargaining, pivotal members' attitudes can affect bills at each step in the legislative process (Baron and Ferejohn 1989). Turning to the institutional rules governing debate, work shows that bills are passed with larger majorities when more politicians are allowed to participate (giving them opportunities to further their careers) (Baron 1989). Furthermore, the support of a committee chair can lead to increased coalition sizes (Baron 1989). The importance of debate rules is further outlined by work arguing that members base their decisions off of the available information. Under rules that limit debate, committee members have less information and are less likely to put their careers at risk by taking a position (Denzau and Mackay 1983).

Others seek to combine the distributional and partisan models. Cann (2008) examines the selection process for committee chairs. He finds that, unlike in the partisan model, seniority in the party is not the most important factor in being appointed chair. He points to the importance of the chair candidates' individual contributions to the party and party unity in selecting the chairs (Cann 2008). Although not a strictly legislative matter, such work sheds light on thinking within the committee.

Chapter 3: Theory

In summary, the three existing theories focus on individual member preferences, the breakdown of party control, and the institutional powers of influential lawmakers. The originators of these ideas often wrote their works in direct opposition to each other and this led to a series of pieces that attempt to lend support to one idea over another. Alone, each theory makes sense. However, works show that individual models do not explain aspects of Congress such as committee chair selection (Cann 2008), support for individual bills (Baron 1989), and, most importantly, gridlock (Chiou and Rothenberg 2003) as well as theory combinations.

In seeking to explain why some bills move through House committees and others do not, this research builds upon those promising leads by combining parts of all three models. I believe that these theories are complimentary and there is no reason that a single theory has to be “the” explanation for legislative behavior. Some of the earliest work examining committees theorizes that legislative behavior related to both member goals and the institutional processes of the body, including influential members (Smith 1986). Although the literature often argues that one approach is better than another, the initial findings of the multi-theory models (Baron and Ferejohn 1989, Chiou and Rothenberg 2003, Cann 2008) suggest that there may be more going on in legislators minds than a single theory can account for.

Similarly, I expect an analysis of legislative activities at the committee level to show that variables from each school of thought will be significant in moving a bill through the steps of the committee process. The reality is, regardless of what individual theories suggest, legislators are affected (or at least cognizant of) all the different factors suggested by the three models. For example, it would be naïve to subscribe to the distributional model, and then discount the fact

that members of congress are aware of both how large (and unified) a majority may be and also the individual preferences of influential actors (such as committee chairs). Therefore, examining many variables simultaneously echoes the real world situation that legislators find themselves in every day. A model that combines variables from each theory provides a better theoretical answer to my research question and allows for statistical calculations that show the relative effect each variable has on a bill's passage through the committee process.

Models of Congressional behavior have often been examined by looking at the very public actions of members when their behavior is likely to be observed by constituents and other concerned interests. Committee actions, however, are often neglected by the public and it is in these areas where a member's true motivations may be more likely revealed. Little work attempts to explain the discrete decisions in these groups and this piece sheds light on a virtually unstudied, yet crucial, aspect of the legislative process. Existing theories imply that what motivates individuals in a larger Congressional arena will continue to motivate them in a smaller body. I test to see if factors that affect lawmakers when the public is watching will still be important in the internal actions of House committees.

I refer to the time a bill spends in committee as a process because it is not the job of the committee to simply approve or kill a piece of legislation. Once a bill is referred to a committee, several things can occur. The committee can opt to do nothing, effectively halting its progress. However, for those pieces of legislation that it deems worthy, the committee can hold a hearing to gain more information and/or a markup session to alter their language and content. Following such action, a bill can be voted on by the committee. If the vote is in the affirmative, a report can be issued to the floor. During any one of these steps, the committee can stop working on the bill, again halting its progress.

When examining factors that effect on the committee process, it becomes necessary to think of a bill needing to passing through three stages: action, vote, and report. These three discrete steps are the dependent variables that my theory explains. Table 1 reports the variables likely to be significant considering the existing models of legislative behavior. This table also reports the relationship I expect each to have with each dependent variable. While their measurement will be discussed in a following section, it should be noted that while some variables should be significant according to the literature already reviewed, I expect that some will fail to achieve statistical significance once they are pitted against one another.

Table 1: Hypothesized Relationships

	Action Taken	Committee Vote	Committee Report
Action Taken	N/A	+	+
Committee Vote	N/A	N/A	+
Senate Bill	+	+	+
Months Until Election	-	-	-
Ideology	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Unified Congress	+	+	+
Unified Government	+	+	+
Committee Chair	+	+	+
Majority Influence	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Different Committee Chair	+	+	+
Ranking Member	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Different Ranking Member	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Party Leader	+	+	+
Number of Career Politicians	+	+	+
Number of Cosponsors	+	+	+
Sponsor's Time in Congress	+	+	+
District Interest	+	+	+

+ = Positive Effect

- = Significant Effect

A variety of other factors could explain what significant relationships may or may not be present. It could be that committee behavior is dictated by an entirely different group of variables than those suggested by the three existing theories. Or it could be that there is no trend in such behavior. As for the predicted relationships for these variables, they were selected by my interpretation of the literature (more in depth explanations will be provided in the analysis section). The variables themselves were sorted into four groups based on the three theories and certain variables that could not be neatly assigned to a single model. If my hypotheses are not proven, it could be that these variables behave differently when they interact with a large group of variables as opposed to thinking of them in isolation.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Data

Using each stage of the committee process as a dependent variable, I conduct three logistical regressions measuring the probability legislation clears a particular hurdle. Logistical regression analysis is chosen because the dependent variables are dichotomous. The dependent variables correspond to the three major stages of the committee process – action taken, committee vote, and committee report. Because of the sequential nature of the committee process, the earlier dependent variables are used as independent variables for the latter steps.

Since my research question is concerned with why some bills pass through the committee process and others do not, individual bills act as the unit of analysis. By selecting individual bills, variation among individual members and committee chairs is better captured. Each bill has its own sponsor, who possesses their own motivations, and each bill is introduced into the

committee under slightly different circumstances. If the entire House was examined (focusing on the overall number of bills that left committee and variables that applied to committee characteristics), such distinctions could be overlooked. Using individual bills allows me to capture variation on three different levels. I include the aforementioned traits of individual sponsors, the aspects of the entire committee that the bill is referred to, and features of Congress as a whole.

Ideally, every bill from every committee over an extended period of time would be examined; however, collecting this amount of data exceeded both my timeframe and budget. I made decisions as to both what committees and sessions of Congress I would include in my analysis. I selected the Transportation and Infrastructure, Commerce, and Armed Services committees. Together they handle approximately 30% of all bills that move through the House.¹ This is a substantial amount of legislation and provides a large enough sample size to capture variation in my independent variables. Furthermore, they were selected because they are all committees with authorizing power (the ability to create programs) and cover a wide variety of different types of legislation. Some bills may deal with highway legislation while others deal with army pension matters. This varying focus will allow for the differences that may arise when members are dealing specific types of legislation to emerge. If models for legislative behavior hold true, a bill will have the same likelihood of passing through a committee regardless of its subject matter, yet including a range of policy only strengthens the conclusions that can be drawn.

I also chose a timeframe. The ideal here would have been to look at each committee during a wide range of years. This too would have been beyond my means for this project. I look

¹ Personal calculations based off of data on [beta.Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)

at a period from the 104th through the 112th Congress (1995-2013). This 18 year period introduces a great deal of variation that is related to the partisan model. There were several different combinations of party control over the House, Senate, and Presidency. This variation is required if ideas such as party control, ideology, and majority size are to be examined. Additionally, such a long time frame allows for increased turnover among members of Congress. Any variable that is directly related to an individual legislator will show an increased range and will provide stronger results.

Each one of these committees will be looked at during several different Congresses. The Transportation committee will be examined during the 104th, 107th, and 110th sessions, the Commerce Committee will be examined during the 105th, 108th, and 111th sessions, and the Armed Services Committee will be examined during the 106th, 109th, and 112th sessions. For the sake of feasibility, a decision had to be made to only look at one committee per Congressional session. Again, if the theorized models hold true, the same variables should affect every bill regardless of which committee it is referred to or which Congress it is a part of.

Finally, the methods I use provide a large number of individual cases. I collected data for 5,339 bills, and my selection technique provides sufficient variation across both time and membership characteristics. Furthermore, a bill being acted upon in a committee is a rare event. Based upon the data collected, action occurs for only about 8% of bills, votes occur for 6% of bills, and 5% of bills are reported out of committee. If a random selection technique had been used, the data could have been skewed drastically in the direction of bills that did not make it out of committee. Therefore, it was necessary to look at *all* of the bills referred to a specific committee in order to accurately capture the number of bills that were acted upon. Given a greater amount of time and resources, an increased scope could have been used that examined

every bill from each Congress over this time period. However this technique solves such potential problems while still providing a large amount of data.

In order to capture any potential effects that may arise from the diverse circumstances surrounding an individual bill, my model uses a range of independent variables. The first of these does not come from any theory specifically, but can be tied to ideas surrounding the importance of institutional processes in predicting a bill's likelihood of passage. Specifically, work shows that bills from the Senate, by nature of their earlier vetting in that chamber, can have more success in the House (Shepsle and Weingast 1987). I include dichotomous measure of whether or not a bill originated in the Senate before going to the House. This data was obtained from the Congressional Bills Project, and I believe there will be a positive correlation between this variable and movement through each of the phases of the committee process.

I also measure the amount of time (in months) until the closest Congressional election. If the distributional model holds true members will be primarily concerned with reelection and will be more pragmatic as their next contest approaches (Mayhew 2004). I calculated this variable based upon data from both the Congressional Bills Project and from Congress's website. I hypothesize that as elections approach, politicians will be less likely to move any bill through committee in order to keep a low profile (or in order to keep the focus on their past actions).

I also include several variables that are related to aspects of the partisan model. The first of these measures the partisan ideology of the committee and comes from an alternative explanation to the theory (Wright, Schickler, and Rich 1997). The argument in the literature states that bills are passed when Congress has a strong ideological tilt. I averaged the first dimension DW-Nominate scores for all members in a committee to calculate this variable (obtained from voteview.com). The data have a range from "-1" (liberal) to "1" (conservative). I

do not expect to see any relationship between this measure and my dependent variables because I believe that when combined with other variables, the committee's ideology will not be statistically significant.

More directly tied to the partisan model itself are two dichotomous variables that capture partisan control of Washington. One variable examines if the House and Senate are controlled by the same party and the other looks at whether Congress and the Presidency are controlled by the same party. The partisan model is based upon the idea that bills are more likely to pass through Congress when such situations are present (Cox and McCubbins 1993). I collected the data from Congress's website and I expect both variables to show a positive relationship with all three stages of the committee process.

My final variable related to the partisan model captures both the effect of being part of the majority (Cox and McCubbins 1993) and the idea that majorities tend to stack committees when their number of seats is smaller (Hedlund et al. 2009). This variable is calculated by multiplying the percentage difference the majority party has over the minority party by one if a bill is sponsored by a member of the majority and a zero if it is sponsored by a member of the minority. I manually computed these data from figures obtained on Congress's website. Yet, I do not expect this to prove to be a significant variable because so many bills are referred to a committee each session that I do not believe that there will be a sizeable difference between the number of bills acted upon from the majority when compared to the minority.

The potential effects brought about by a bill being sponsored by a particularly influential politician were also accounted for. The rationale for all of these variables comes from the informational model because it argues that gatekeeping politicians can use their positions to control the flow of legislation (Kreihbel 1998). I include two dichotomous variables that capture

whether a bill was sponsored by the committee chair of the referred committee or a committee chair from any other committee. I expect both of these variables to have significant positive relationships because committee chairs wield a great deal of control over what happens to bills once they enter their domain. I think this will be the case even when the committee chair is in charge of another committee.

On the other side, two dichotomous variables capture the effects of a bill being sponsored by either the ranking member of the referred committee or another ranking member. Unlike the committee chair variables however, I did not hypothesize that these dichotomous measures to show any significance. Ranking members do have some institutional power, but I believe that their effect will not prove to be statistically significant when combined with my other variables. It was necessary to include these individuals in my model because under the institutional model, they could still have an effect. All four of these variables were obtained from the Congressional Bills Project.

Finally, another dichotomous variable tracks whether a bill was sponsored by a member of either party's leadership (a whip, head of a party, or Speaker) and excludes committee chairs. These data were obtained from the Congressional Bills Project and theoretically tie to the heart of the informational model with its ideas about "pivotal" players (Kreihbel 1998). Because of the importance of these positions, I expect that the regular members of the committee will want to create a good relationship with these important figures by supporting their legislation. I hypothesize that this variable will show a positive relationship with all three stages of the committee process.

I also include several variables that are not strictly from any one theory. They were selected because I believe that they are factors that may prove to have an effect on the committee

process. The first of these measures the percentage of committee members who have had previous work experience as politicians in some other body, as public servants, or as Congressional staffers (data obtained from the CQ Congress Collection). Such experience will allow these members to have a better understanding of the minutia of the committee process and when to support a bill's passage through the committee process. I hypothesize that the higher this percentage is the more likely it is that a bill will move through each step.

I also use a simple measure of the raw number of cosponsors for each bill (obtained from the Congressional Bills Project). Cosponsoring a bill is a form of credit claiming that can be traced to the distributional model (Mayhew 2004). I do not include this variable with the other distributional measures because I believe other factors, besides credit claiming, could cause a lawmaker to cosponsor a bill. Regardless, I expect there to be a positive relationship between the number of cosponsors a bill has and its progress through each stage of the committee process.

I also measure each bill's sponsor's time in Congress in order to capture the experience level a particular legislator may have. This measure was calculated manually from data obtained from the Congressional Bills Project. I hypothesize that those politicians who are most familiar with the committee process (i.e. those that have been in Congress for the longest time) will have a better understanding of what it takes to get a bill through committee. I expect to find a positive relationship between the bills sponsored by such individuals and success at each stage of the committee process.

My final independent variable captures the demographic characteristics of committee members' districts. For bills referred to the Transportation Committee, the percentage of workers in a district employed in the transportation and utilities sector is used. For bills referred to the Commerce Committee, the percentage of workers employed in manufacturing is used. And for

the Armed Services Committee, the percentage of workers that are employed by the military for each district is used. These numbers are averaged for all of the members of a particular committee for each bill. For this variable, a bill referred to the Transportation Committee will have the average percentage, for all districts represented in the committee, of transportation sector workers. Data for this variable were obtained from the Congressional District Data database. I believe that this measure will have a positive relationship with my dependent variables at every step of the committee process.

Below, in Table 2, are the results of my three logistic regressions using all of the aforementioned variables. Following the table, there is a discussion of my findings.

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Explaining Committee Activity

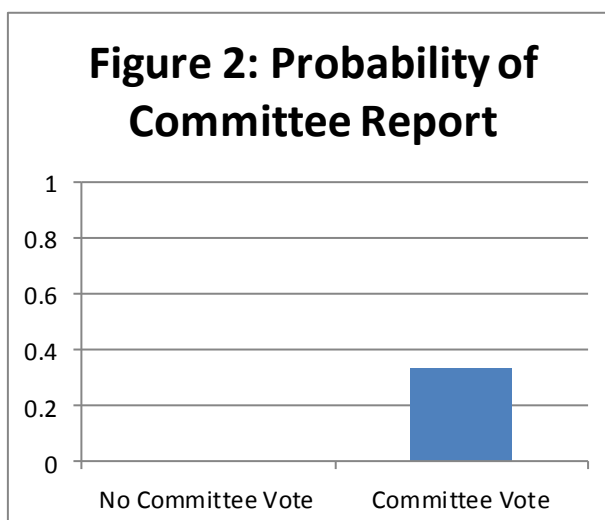
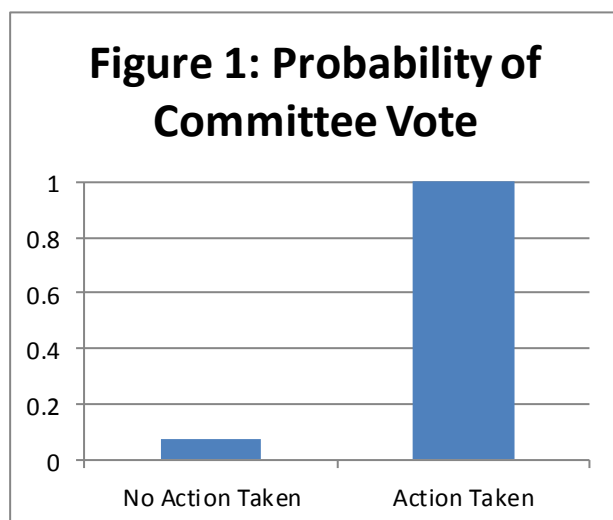
	Action Taken (Standard Error)	Committee Vote (Standard Error)	Reported from Committee (Standard Error)
Action Taken	N/A	8.881 *** (0.554)	1.113 (1.176)
Committee Vote	N/A	N/A	10.03 *** (1.301)
Senate Bill	-4.220 (0.382)	3.115 *** (0.856)	1.146 (1.145)
Months Until Election	0.019 * (0.008)	-0.030 (0.021)	0.088 * (0.039)
Ideology	-13.67 *** (2.311)	5.627 (5.875)	7.739 (12.45)
Unified Congress	-2.717 *** (0.736)	-1.140 (1.504)	-1.577 (2.464)
Unified Government	-0.253 (0.163)	0.281 (0.389)	1.761 (0.915)
Committee Chair	-1.143 (1.043)	-18.78 (7401)	-13.67 (8134)
Majority Influence	-0.015 (0.015)	-0.020 (0.037)	-0.030 (0.073)
Different Committee Chair	-0.109	-0.212	0.591

	(0.256)	(0.570)	(1.353)
Ranking Member	0.086 (0.557)	-1.178 (1.037)	-3.101 (1.737)
Different Ranking Member	-0.407 (0.340)	-0.003 (0.745)	0.892 (1.527)
Party Leader	-0.592 (0.737)	0.760 (2.851)	0.123 (4.100)
Number of Career Politicians	0.047 *** (0.010)	-0.065 * (0.025)	-0.036 (0.054)
Number of Cosponsors	0.007 *** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.005)
Sponsor's Time in Congress	0.004 *** (0.001)	0.000 (0.000)	0.005 * (0.002)
District Interest	-10.18 *** (1.927)	-9.775 * (4.638)	3.833 (9.122)
Constant	-2.496 *** (0.388)	-5.411 *** (1.047)	-10.73 *** (2.143)
Number of Cases	5339	5339	5339
Pseudo R Square	.106	.853	.947

p < .05*, .01**, .001***

When examining these results, an interesting picture emerges. I had hypothesized that the same variables would be significant at every stage of the committee process, yet this appears not to be the case. Instead, the most important factor in determining whether or not a bill is reported out of committee is whether any action is taken. In this sense, having action taken seems to function as a gatekeeping phase for committee reports. This is evidenced by the fact that after this first stage, the number of significant variables diminishes greatly. In determining whether or not action occurs, seven different independent variables appear to have some kind of effect, only four variables effect committee voting (one of which is whether or not any action has occurred), and only three variables impact committee reporting (one of which is whether or not any committee vote has taken place). Based on this, it appears that if a bill is acted upon, its chances for a committee vote greatly improve which increases the likelihood of a committee report. The following predicted probabilities show the dramatic effect that these earlier stages have on later

ones. Having action taken virtually guarantees a committee vote (Figure 1); and if a vote occurs, nearly 1/3 of those bills will be reported from the committee (Figure 2).



In order to form a more detailed picture, it is easiest to break the table up by the three different regressions that were run. For the first regression, measuring the likelihood of action being taken, the model has a chi-square value of 248.72 (with a significance value of .000). This implies that the variables within the model are accounting for a statistically significant amount of variation in the dependent variable.

For this regression, several independent variables proved significant. The time until a Congressional election, the ideology of the committee, whether or not Congress was controlled by a single party, the number of committee members with previous political experience, the number of cosponsors for a particular bill, the amount of time a sponsor had spent in Congress, and district demographic information all proved to be significant. The time until a Congressional election, the number of committee members with previous political experience, the number of cosponsors, and the amount of time a sponsor had spent in Congress displayed a positive

relationship, while the committee's ideology, whether or not Congress was unified, and district demographic information showed a negative relationship. Several of my hypothesized significant variables were not including in this list. This demonstrates that fewer variables are truly relevant in the committee process than I initially expected. This could be due to the way the variables interacted with each other in the model or it could be that only the above variables have an effect on committee action.

Having action taken appears to be the crucial stage in determining a bill's progress through the rest of the steps in committee. The variable measuring months until a congressional election has a positive relationship with whether or not action is taken. This coincides with my hypothesis and suggests that the further away from an election that a bill is introduced, the more likely it is to be acted upon in committee. This point makes sense because, if one accepts the reelection premise of the distributional theory, individual politicians may be less likely to take a hard position on a piece of legislation.

My measure of ideology shows a negative relationship with action taken means that the larger the positive score of the committee (more "conservative" on the DW nominate scale), the less likely it is that a bill will be acted upon. This finding conflicts with my hypothesis and is somewhat surprising. A possible explanation could be that conservatives are, inherently, conservative. One could expect such a political outlook to foster a desire to maintain the status quo and an aversion to support new pieces of legislation.

The presence of a unified congress also displays a negative relationship, again conflicting with my hypothesis. This implies that if both chambers of Congress are controlled by the same party, it is less likely that a bill will receive a hearing or a markup session. This goes against the partisan theory; however, one could suppose that in a unified Congress, the minority party may

introduce more pieces of “protest legislation.” Such legislation would have little prospect of being moved through committee, yet it would allow these members to take positions and credit-claim. If a sufficient number of such bills were introduced, it could lower the overall percentage of bills that move through committee, creating a negative relationship. This is an interesting idea but is far from proven in this study and further research would be needed to test its validity.

The average number of career politicians on a committee has a positive relationship with action taken, agreeing with my hypothesis. This would imply that the more career politicians there are on a committee, the more likely it is that a bill will have action taken upon it. This could be because these career politicians have more legislative experience (and are able to handle the legislative load more effectively) or because they are better equipped to determine which bills would be beneficial for their political careers if a hearing occurs.

A similar variable, also with a positive relationship, is the amount of time the sponsor of a bill has spent in Congress. This could be seen as a parallel to the number of career politicians in a committee. More experienced legislators (assuming one becomes more experienced the longer they serve) will have a better grasp of the legislative system and will only sponsor bills that they believe have a chance of going somewhere.

Finally, as far as determining whether action is taken, the last variable to show a relationship is average district interest. This variable’s negative relationship implies that the larger the average number of workers from the committee specific sector per district is, the less likely it is that a bill will be acted upon (disagreeing with my hypothesis). This is the most puzzling of the relationships, but it could be a reflection of the fact that when bills mean more to the members’ constituents, they become less likely to credit claim or associate with just any bill. They want to show results back home so perhaps they act on fewer bills and focus their attention

on only those they believe will be marketable to their constituents. Again this is just an idea that arises from the data presented and more research would have to be conducted in this direction.

After a bill is acted upon, it has made it past the first and largest hurdle and then goes to the committee vote stage. The most important variable here, with a strong positive relationship, is whether or not action was taken. Put bluntly, if a bill is acted upon it has a much greater chance of going to a vote by this fact alone. For the second regression, the chi-square value for the model was 2136.94 and had a significance value of .000.

Fewer variables proved to be significant in this regression. Whether action was taken, the originating chamber, the amount of career politicians, and demographic aspects of the districts all appeared to be significant. Again, I had hypothesized that more variables would prove significant; however it appears that even fewer aspects have an impact on a committee vote. As shown in Figure 1, if action is taken, a bill is virtually guaranteed a vote.

Although having had action previously taken appears to be the most important factor, the fact that a bill originated in the Senate also shows a positive relationship with committee voting. This means that if a bill enters the House via the Senate it has a greater chance of being voted upon in committee. This agrees with my hypothesis. The explanation could be that the Senate committee process acts as a screening phase and by the time the bill reaches the House, the members feel comfortable voting on it. Another perspective could be that the House will want to have a committee vote on most Senate bills either for the above reason or because the committee wants to make a public statement of disagreement with the Senate. This dependent variable does not suggest either a positive vote or a negative vote, simply whether or not a vote has occurred.

Interestingly, at this point in the committee process, the average number of career politicians on the committee has a negative relationship instead of the positive one it displayed

during the action phase (and that I expected). The more career politicians on a committee the more likely it is that a bill receives some kind of action but the less likely it is that a bill is voted upon. There are several possible explanations for this apparent contradiction. It could be that at the stage of committee action, credit claiming is the more important motivation. When it comes time for a vote, the members may not want to risk their political capital on supporting a measure that far. Alternatively, members could be unlikely to vote on a subject if they intend to keep a bill alive for future elections or it could be that they imagine a better alternative in the future. Again such questions are only speculation and more research would need to be conducted to definitively say which, if any, of these options is most likely.

Finally, the average district interest appears to be significant in a negative relationship to committee votes. This is the same relationship it displayed at the action level so one can assume that the same factors are at work here. Again it is possible that member's only want to vote on the most beneficial bills for their districts, thus decreasing the overall number of bills that receive votes.

For the final stage of the committee process, whether or not a bill is reported out of committee, even fewer variables are at work. There is a strong positive relationship between whether or not a committee vote occurred and if a report is issued. This coincides with the overarching story that the committee process is sequential. If a bill has action taken on it, it is more likely that it will receive a vote, and it is voted upon, it is more likely to be reported out of committee. The third regression had a chi-square value of 2361.84 with a significance value of .000.

In this regression, the presence of a vote, the time until the next election, and the amount of time a sponsor spent in Congress all displayed a significant relationship. Additionally, all of these variables appeared to have a positive relationship with the likelihood of a committee report.

The variable capturing the number months until a congressional election (from the time of a bill's introduction) again has a positive relationship with committee reports. This means the further away from an election the more likely it is that a bill will be reported. One can assume that this is because of the same possible reasons as in the committee stage. Lawmakers who seek reelection are less likely to issue a committee report (and become tied to a particular piece of legislation) close to an election.

The last variable that showed significance was the sponsor's time in Congress at introduction. Like before, these more experienced legislators only would sponsor a bill that they believe has chance of being passed on the floor. The more experienced they are, the better they become at picking bills that will get reported out of committee.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

An interesting picture has emerged from this research. It appears as though the committee process is highly sequential. Action leads to a vote that, in turn, leads to a committee report. At each step of the way there are several variables that appear to have an impact on a particular bill moving through this process. There are more of these at the level of action taken and fewer as the bill moves through committee. While variables from the distributional, partisan, and informational models all influenced whether or not action was taken, the variables that determine the likelihood of a committee vote do not come from any strict theoretical perspective.

Furthermore, committee report is influenced only by variables from the distributional and informational models.

In relation to the existing theories, the committee process appears more nuanced. There is no one group of variables that explain legislative behavior holistically at the committee level. Rather, determining what bills will pass through each stage of the committee and which will not seems to be the result of a complex relationship between many theoretically distinct variables. Thus, my hypothesis that a multi-theory approach explains committee behavior appears most applicable and the thinking around legislative behavior as a whole should reflect this perspective.

The crucial gatekeeping stage of committee action is influenced by a range of variables from all three theoretical perspectives. The time until a Congressional election, the ideology of the committee, whether or not Congress was controlled by a single party, the number of committee members with previous political experience, the number of cosponsors for a particular bill, the amount of time a sponsor had spent in Congress, and district demographic information all proved to be significant. This agrees with my theory that the same factors that motivate Congress on a larger level also play a role in minute decisions with the committee.

The picture is not as clear in regards to what factors influence the occurrence of a committee vote. As shown by Figure 1, a vote is virtually guaranteed by an instance of committee action. However variables related to the bill's originating chamber, the number of career politicians, and district demographic data also play a role. Fewer issues seem to matter to lawmakers when determining whether or not to have a vote on a bill. Additionally, none of these variables come specifically from a theoretical model. This casts doubt on these theories' validity in explaining all legislative behavior.

Finally, a committee report is largely determined by the earlier occurrence of a vote, yet the time until an election and the number of cosponsors are also statistically significant. While the number of cosponsors is not tied to a theory, the time until a Congressional election reinforces the distributional theory's premise that politicians are primarily concerned with staying in office.

Moving forward, there are many possible directions for this research to go. Each one of the significant variables could be looked at through a closer lens to determine exactly what factors are at work when assessing their impact on the legislative process. Additionally, special attention could be paid to why the average number of career politicians on a committee has a positive effect on committee action but a negative effect on a committee vote for individual bills. Furthermore, this research only looked at a fraction of the bills that move through an individual Congress. If more data were collected (a more time consuming process than could have been undertaken here) the results could be strengthened. It would also be interesting to apply these same principles to Congress as a whole. Examining the process of a bill moving through the House, Senate, and eventually to the Presidency in a similar stepwise fashion could produce very interesting insights into legislative behavior at a larger scale. This would especially be the case if a similar, wide-scope, approach was used.

Ultimately, this research sheds light on the otherwise opaque committee process. If one can assess how the House's legislative organs function (the committees) one can gain a better perspective on when the House will operate in an effective manner as well. The picture that has emerged shows that there are certainly some variables that make a particular bill more or less likely to move through the committee process, and if further research supports these findings,

American voters should be cognizant of these when electing their representatives and evaluating how their legislative branch is performing.

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