Legislative Leviathan

Party Government
In the House

Second edition

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Acknowledgements

We thank the following people for their valuable and insightful, if not always heeded, comments: Joel Aberbach, Josh Cohen, Joe Cooper, Vince Crawford, John Ferejohn, Morris Fiorina, Gary Jacobson, Sam Kernell, Rod Kiewiet, Keith Krehbiel, Skip Lupia, Roger Noll, Bruce Oppenheimer, Nelson Polsby, Keith Poole, David Rohde, Francis Rosenbluth, Tom Schwartz, Ken Shepsle, Steve Smith and Barry Weingast. We thank William Heller, Jonathan Katz, Diane Lin, Sharyn O'Halloran, Brian Sala and Alexandra Shankster for their invaluable assistance. We thank Gary Jacobson, Rod Kiewiet, Garrison Nelson, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal for sharing their data with us. We acknowledge the support of NSF (grant # SES-8811022 and # SES-9022882) and UCSD. Finally, we thank our wives for their patience, love and support, and children—Dylan Cox, Colin McCubbins, and Kenny McCubbins—for their reasonably regular sleep habits, generally sweet dispositions, and consistently low bounce-weights.

Introduction

> Congress is a collection of committees that come together periodically to approve one another's actions (Clem Miller, Member of the House).

Scholars who compare political parties invariably conclude that American parties are much weaker than their European counterparts: they are much less cohesive on legislative votes; their influence over the flow of legislation is less complete; they control but a small fraction of campaign money; they exercise almost no control over nominations; the list could go on. Within the American context, observers have commonly concluded that parties influence legislators less than pressure groups, political action committees, or constituents. Much of the literature of the 1970s and 1980s, moreover, was devoted to the thesis that American parties were declining--both in the electoral and the legislative arenas. In the literature dealing with Congress, assessments of parties sometimes came close to denying entirely their importance:

> Throughout most of the postwar years, political parties in Congress have been weak, ineffectual organizations.... In many ways ... [they] have been 'phantoms' of scholarly imagination that were perhaps best exorcised from attempts to explain congressional organization, behavior, and process. (Dodd and Oppenheimer 1977, 41)

If parties are so weak, then what are the organizing principles of American politics? The literature provides a ready stock of answers: In the electoral arena, it is the individual candidates who have the most powerful organizations, who collect the most money, and who define the course of electoral campaigns. In the legislative arena, it is above all the standing committees of Congress--and, in the 1970s and 1980s, their subcommittees--that are the centers of power. The standard wisdom on the postwar Congress was that it had been an exercise first in "committee government," then in "subcommittee government." Party government usually received mention only as something conspicuously absent.

This book reevaluates the role of parties and committees, and the interactions between them, in the post-World War II House of Representatives. Our view is that parties in the House--especially majority parties--are a species of "legislative cartel." These cartels seize the power, theoretically resident in the House, to make rules governing the structure and process of legislation. Possession of this rule-making power leads to two main consequences. First, the legislative process in general--and the committee system in particular--is stacked in favor of majority party interests. Second, because members of the majority party have all the structural advantages, the key players in most legislative deals are members of the majority party and the majority party's central agreements are facilitated by cartel rules and policed by the cartel's leadership.

Just like members of other cartels, members of majority parties face continual incentives to "cheat" on the deals that have been struck. These incentives to cheat threaten both the existence of the cartel and the efficient operation of the relevant "market"--in this case, in legislative trades. The structure of the majority party and the

structure that the majority party imposes on the House can be viewed as resolving or ameliorating members' incentives to cheat, thereby facilitating mutually beneficial trade.

It will take the rest of the book to explain fully what we mean when we describe parties as legislative cartels. The next section of this introduction considers some of the views of party against which we react and to which we look for inspiration or evidence. Section 2 then sets out the dominant "committee government" model. Finally, section 3 offers a road map to the rest of the book.

1. The Weakness of Parties

The dominant theme in the literature on American parties throughout the 1970s and 1980s, whether it dealt with the electoral or the legislative arena, was one of decline. The electoral side of the story was one of fewer voters casting straight-party ballots, fewer citizens willing to identify with any political party, a reduced role for party officials in the Presidential nominating process, an increasing advantage for incumbents in House elections, and other signs of party decay (Wattenberg 1984; Crotty 1984). The trends were large enough so that some suggested that the future may hold "the evolution of a basically partyless electorate" (Crotty 1984, 276).[1]

The legislative side of the story went hand in hand with the electoral.[2] Both studies of roll call voting and of party organization have furnished independent evidence of party decline. The roll call evidence (reviewed in detail in chapter 7) is marshaled primarily in studies published in the 1970s and 1980s. The chief conclusion then was that levels of party voting in the House had declined, albeit unsteadily, since the revolt against Speaker Cannon in 1910. Studies of party organization also had noted a decline

[1] . However, numerous scholars have since written on the reversal of this trend. See Jacobson (2000); Bond and Fleischer (2000); Davidson and Oleszek (2000) and Roberts and Smith(2003), for example.
[2] . Miller 1962, 110

in the post-Cannon House, with the Speakership weakened, the party caucuses largely quiescent, and each party's committee on committees (CC) operating within the confines of an inflexible seniority system that largely removed any opportunity for partisan tinkering with the leadership of the standing committees of the House.

The evidence on party organization did change considerably in the late 1960s and early '70s, as a wave of reform hit the House. Among other changes, the Democratic Caucus was reactivated, the Speakership strengthened, and Democratic committee assignment duties transferred to a new, leadership-dominated Steering and Policy Committee. Nonetheless, the House in the 1970s also instituted reforms that greatly increased the status of subcommittees, and most congressional scholars have seen these "decentralizing" reforms as more than counterbalancing the increased powers of the party leadership (see, for example, Collie and Brady 1985, 275; Crotty 1984, 279; Shepsle and Weingast 1984, 354). The dominant interpretation of the 1970s reforms is that they served to convert a decentralized system of "committee government" into an even more decentralized system of "subcommittee government" (Davidson 1981; Shepsle and Weingast 1984).

In the last few years, high levels of party cohesion and an activist leadership have again motivated scholars to consider the notion of "party government." For example, Rohde (1991) discusses parties as conditionally active coalitions, taking action when there is widespread agreement. In this model, termed *conditional party government*, the majority party leadership's power becomes more consolidated as its members become more homogenous in preferences (Rhode 1991; Aldrich and Rhode 1995; Aldrich and

Rhode 2001).[3] Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991) consider parties as procedural coalitions, arguing that the majority party uses structure and process to manage the appropriations process.[4] For most of the postwar era, however, the dominant theme is anything but "party government."[5] As Brady and Bullock (1983, 623) put it: "Anyone reviewing the literature on elections, congressional reforms, and congressional policy making cannot fail to be impressed by the extent to which they show party declining in the United States."

1.1 The Limited Role of Parties

Although many in the 1970s and 1980s believed that congressional parties had declined in importance, this is not to say that they were ignored. But their role was often seen as quite limited. A survey of works on Congress yields three basic ways in which the role of parties was seen to be limited.

First, there is the idea that parties are primarily floor voting coalitions that have relatively little systematic influence on prefloor (i.e., committee) behavior. In this view, party leaders' sphere of action is confined mostly to the floor stages of legislation.[6] The

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[3] Therefore, in the era of so-called partisan decline—specifically, before the South had realigned—members were quite heterogeneous and unwilling to cede power to their leadership; the mid 1990s, on the other hand, gave rise to extremely polarized and homogeneous parties. The extreme consolidation of power into Speaker Gingrich's (R-GA) hands thus fits with the conditional party government model. However, it is important to note that this model focused upon positive agenda control, specifically.

[4] For more on this, see Cox and McCubbins 2002 and 2005; Cox and Poole 2002.

[5] For characterizations of the so-called "party-less" model, see Krehbiel (1998) and Brady and Volden (1998).

[6]. The conceptual link between increasingly weak electoral parties and declining partisanship in Congress has been clearly and repeatedly made. Brady and Bullock (1983, 623), for example, write: "When party becomes a less important determinant of voting in elections, then candidates, issues, organization, money, and the professionalization of campaign staffs become more important. Representatives elected to Congress under these conditions are less likely to follow party cues."

crucial prefloor stages of legislation are the domain of the committees, and party influences attenuate the deeper one gets into the committee system (Fenno 1962, 318; Jones 1977, 184). One consequence of this view is that the literature's central measure of how strong parties are is their cohesion on roll call votes rather than, say, their success in structuring the committee system to their benefit or their cohesion on committee votes.[7]

A second idea is that parties are primarily procedural coalitions that have relatively little influence over the substance of legislation. Jones (1964, 5), for example, argues that, "the political party functions to organize a conflict resolution process. The party willingly assumes the responsibility for organizing the process--providing personnel (including leadership), making rules, establishing committees--without assuming either responsibility for results or the power to control them." An oft-noted bit of evidence for this view is the pattern of party behavior on roll call votes: the parties are monoliths when it comes to electing a Speaker, adopting sessional rules, and a few other procedural votes, but they break up quickly and in myriad ways on matters of substance.

A third idea is that party leaders' actions in Congress are conditional on the support of the party membership on a case by case basis, rather than taken as part of a more general and unconditional delegation of power, as in Great Britain. As Rohde (1991, 31) puts it, in describing the "conditional party government" that Democratic reformers were striving for in the 1970s:

"Unlike in parliamentary systems, party would not be the dominant influence across all issues, and the leadership would not make policy decisions which would receive

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[7] . As Sinclair (1988, 3) puts it: "In our traditional understanding of Congress ..., party leaders are associated primarily with coalition building, especially at the floor stage." Ripley (1967, 114) notes that "numerous case studies ... emphasize that the parties are much more important on the floor than in committees."

automatic support from the rank and file. Rather, the direction of influence would be reversed and there would be party responsibility only if there were widespread policy agreement among House Democrats. When agreement was present on a matter that was important to party members, the leadership would be expected to use the tools at their disposal ... to advance the cause."[8]

Each of these limitations on party activity--to the floor rather than prefloor stages of the legislative process, to procedural rather than substantive issues, to issues on which the party is united rather than to all issues--contrasts with the familiar notion of the responsible party. In this view, properly reformed congressional parties would combine and strengthen the powers attributed to them in the first two views. They would be powerful floor coalitions capable of disciplining their members and passing their programs, and they would be powerful procedural coalitions that effectively dominated the legislative agenda and took responsibility for the final legislative product. Moreover, the default assumption would be that party leaders would act on every issue; an explicit decision not to act would be necessary to make an exception.

1.2 Rational Choice Views of Party

From the perspective of those who seek responsible parties in the Westminster mold, the postwar congressional party has been a kind of New World Cheshire Cat: rather disreputable to begin with and slowly fading away. Moreover, many of the most sophisticated theoretical accounts of Congress, those of the neo-institutional or rational

[8] See Rhode 1991; Aldrich 1995; Aldrich and Rhode 2001.

choice school, are firmly in the "committee government" camp and strongly downplay the importance of parties. Indeed, from the perspective of currently influential rational choice theories, the very existence of parties--even in the limited forms of floor coalitions, procedural coalitions, or "conditionally active" coalitions--seems difficult to explain.

Any attempt to view parties as floor coalitions must confront the spatial model of voting, and the influential "instability" and "chaos" theorems that stem from it (Plott 1967; McKelvey 1976; Schofield 1980). These theorems have been interpreted to mean that holding together any governing coalition in a majority-rule institution is nigh on impossible (cf. Riker 1980). This conclusion, moreover, gibes with the stylized facts of Congress, according to which floor votes are controlled by continually shifting coalitions of narrowly self-interested legislators, who act essentially free of any partisan constraints.[9]

As regards the procedural structure of Congress, the most influential recent work has focused squarely on the committees and the House, ignoring the parties. Shepsle's (1979) seminal work has a committee system and a House, but no parties. Weingast and Marshall (1988) explicitly assume away any partisan influence on the behavior of members of Congress. Gilligan and Krehbiel (1987; see also Krehbiel 1987a) construct a series of models in which the House and the committees play a role, but in which parties do not appear.[10] In little of the modern theoretical work, in other words, does one see

9. One reason for the focus on floor rather than committee votes is that, until passage of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, committee votes were not subject to public scrutiny.

10 . This model also appears in Krehbiel (1998); Brady and Volden (1998); Christophe Crombez, Tim Groseclose, and Keith Krehbiel, "Gatekeeping" (2005).

embodied the traditional notion of parties as procedural coalitions.[11] The reason for this exclusion seems, again, to be the spatial model and its chaos theorems. If coalitional stability is largely illusory, then to take parties as unitary actors in models of congressional structure is unjustified. As Mayhew (1974, 27) put it: "no theoretical treatment of the United States Congress that posits parties as analytic units will go very far."

1.3 The Theoretical Status of Parties

What, then, is the theoretical status of parties? Theorists in an older tradition (e.g., Truman 1959; Jones 1964; Ripley 1967; 1969b) were little troubled by issues of spatial instability and had no problem in taking political parties as analytic units for many purposes. They studied these units as they attempted to control floor outcomes and to organize the legislature for business. A central idea that emerges in many of these studies (see, for example, Cooper, Brady, and Hurley 1977; Ripley 1967; 1969b; Rohde 1991) is that party leaders were strong and active only when the rank and file was reasonably homogeneous in its policy preferences.

By contrast, many theorists in the rational choice school see so much difficulty in getting parties off the ground as anything like unitary actors that they banish them entirely from their theories, focusing instead on individual legislators and their goals.

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11 . This characterization of congressional voting can be found in many places. Thurow (1980, 212), for example, argues that "our problems arise because, in a very real sense, we do not have political parties. A political party is a group that can force its elected members to vote for that party's solutions to society's problems ... we have a system where each elected official is his own party and free to establish his own party platform." Yoder (1990) complains that "by now parties consist, pretty much, of offices in Washington. In Congress, it is everyone for himself."

Neither parties as floor coalitions nor parties as procedural coalitions seem theoretically justified without a theory of how individual legislators can be welded together into a meaningful and stable collectivity. Moreover, this theoretical problem is qualitatively the same whether one is talking about a "homogeneous" party, like the Democrats in the hundredth Congress, or a "heterogeneous" party, like the Democrats in the ninetieth Congress.[12]

This book is our attempt to articulate a view of congressional parties in the postwar House of Representatives that takes the concerns of both traditional and rational choice theorists seriously. Like traditional theorists, we think parties act as both floor and procedural coalitions, and that more homogeneous parties are more likely to be active in both regards. Like rational choice theorists, we are impressed by the theoretical difficulty of taking American parties as unitary actors.

These concerns, it should be noted, are at odds with one another. The first impatiently says, "Of course parties exist. Of course they engage in various activities. Let us get on with the task of studying them." The second says "But a dominant theme in the literature is that parties are so internally divided that they can rarely act with any vigor and purpose. Any theory of parties, therefore, must start at a lower, more fundamental, level--that of the individual, reelection-seeking legislator--and build up from there."

As we have struggled to reconcile these competing demands--for empirical relevance and theoretical rigor--we have come to a view of parties that differs in important respects from both the various traditional and from the rational choice views.

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[12]. For other, committee-based models of Congress that ignore parties see, for example, Fiorina 1977; Mayhew 1974.

Our differences with the rational choice view will be obvious, since much of that view is a negative one--that parties are too internally divided to be either practically effective or theoretically interesting--and we would not have written this book had we agreed with it.

As regards our differences with traditional views of party, there are two in particular that merit emphasis. First, we see a much greater tension between the traditional view of parties as procedural coalitions and the notion (discussed at length in Part II below) that committees in the House are powerful, autonomous actors in the policy-making process. Traditional theorists saw little need to defend themselves against this "committee government" model. Indeed, for the most part they accepted the idea of committee government and evidently saw no reason that their limited notions of party could not peacefully coexist with the dominant emphasis on committees. But, from a rational choice perspective, there is considerable tension between the idea of a party as a procedural coalition that establishes the rules of the legislative game and the idea of committees as autonomous agents virtually beyond party influence. Jones's (1964, 5) acceptance of a party that organizes the process--"making rules, establishing committees"--yet at the same time does not assume the "power to control" legislative events is out of equilibrium, from a rational choice perspective, since it seems to imply that some agent ("the party") is not taking much advantage of its position.

Second, and related, we see the procedural power that the majority party possesses in a different light than does the traditional literature. It is not that we differ as to how these procedural powers might be described. Rather, it is that we see the translation of procedural into substantive advantages as occurring on both an "active" and a "latent" track. Many scholars recognize the active translation of procedural into

substantive advantage, as when the Speaker uses his scheduling power to expedite the progress of a bill he favors to the floor or a committee chairman uses his scheduling power to delay the progress of a bill he opposes. Much less attention has been paid to the substantive advantage that the majority party can attain simply by structuring the committee system--setting up jurisdictions, allocating resources, assigning members, and so forth--and then letting things proceed on "automatic pilot." From this perspective, the committee system is not simply an impediment to responsible party government,[13] but also a tool through which a rather different species of party government can be implemented.[14]

1.4 Plus Ça Change...

The debate in which we engage is hardly new. The reigning methodological canons of the discipline have changed, certainly. But questions about the relative power and importance of parties are perennial.

This point can be brought home quite neatly by quoting from the introduction to David B. Truman's 1959 monograph, *The Congressional Party*. Truman wrote in the aftermath of the famous committee report of the American Political Science Association that called for a strengthening of American political parties along broadly British lines. In light of the contemporary literature, he found it "entirely possible that many Americans hold a view of Congress ... as a chaotic, incoherent aggregation of small-

[13]. That is, it takes extreme homogeneity of preferences, coupled with few dimensions of potential conflict, before the spatial theorems admit of anything like transitive majority preferences. See Aldrich 1988.
[14] . Ralph K. Huitt, for example, argues that "the ultimate check on party government in the United States is the system of standing committees in Congress." Cited in Uslaner 1974, 16.

minded and shortsighted individualists" (Truman 1959, 9). He then proceeded to pose a series of leading questions:

> How close to reality is this impression of the national legislature? How much of pattern and regularity can be found beneath an appearance of unpredictability or even of chaos? Is there any evidence [that] the congressional party is a valuable or significant instrument of governing?... If the legislative party shows any coherent pattern as a stable organizational element in the political system, what of the structure, or structures, through which it is led? Specifically, what are the roles of its designated leaders?

Truman's questions, we think, are still of considerable interest today. They pose an implicit challenge to the standard "committee government" model of postwar congressional research. In the next section, we discuss some of the conventional wisdom associated with that model.

2. Committee Government

Scholarly descriptions of the decline and weakness of parties have gone hand in hand with studies of the power of committees. Stylized characterizations of this power have of course been part of academic discourse and training since the nineteenth century. Just before the dramatic changes in the 1970s that ushered in "subcommittee government," the stock of generalizations could be described as follows:

> The oldest and most familiar is Woodrow Wilson's book-length assertion that committees dominate congressional decision making. A corollary states that committees are autonomous units, which operate quite independently of such external influences as legislative party leaders, chamber majorities, and the President of the United States. Other staples of committee commentary hold ... that each committee is the repository of legislative expertise within its jurisdiction; that committee decisions are usually accepted and ratified by the other members of the chamber; that committee chairmen can (and usually do) wield a great deal of influence over their committees. (Fenno 1973, xiii)

The specific items in this catalogue--asserting committee autonomy, committee expertise, the sanctity of committee decisions, and the power of committee chairpersons--are not all equally important for our present purposes. We shall focus on committee autonomy and decision-making power, discussing the latter first. Our discussion here pertains chiefly to the period of "committee government" from about 1940 to 1970, what Cooper and Brady (1981) call the "Rayburn House." But much of the discussion is relevant to the succeeding period of House history--in part because the literature sees this period as one in which subcommittees simply take over the previous role of committees, and in part because committee autonomy from the floor is a necessary condition for subcommittee autonomy from the floor.

2.1 The Decision-Making Power of Committees

Scholars who refer to the "sanctity of committee decisions" in the Rayburn House usually have in mind both a fact--that committee decisions were rarely overturned by the parent chamber--and an explanation--according to which the relative infrequency of overturned decisions could be attributed to two related factors: a system of decentralized reciprocity between committees ("don't mess with my jurisdiction and I won't mess with yours"); and mutual respect for expertise. That the Rayburn House rarely overruled its committees is usually discussed under two headings, corresponding to committee decisions to do nothing, on the one hand, and committee decisions to do something, on the other.

The negative (or veto) power of committees was (and still is) based on the long-established rules regulating the ordinary course of legislative business, according to which all bills must pass through one of the standing committees before they can be considered on the floor. Woodrow Wilson wrote sorrowfully about this necessity, noting that when a bill "goes from the clerk's desk to a committee room it crosses a bridge of sighs to dim dungeons of silence whence it will never return" (Wilson 1885, 69). Textbooks commonly make the point less dramatically by citing the high percentage of bills that die in committee and the infrequency with which committee decisions to kill a bill are overturned on the floor.[15]

[15] . In the Eighty-ninth Congress, for example, 84 percent of the 26,566 bill introduced were stopped at the committee stage. Ripley's (1983, 145-46) discussion is typical: "There are ways around the committee system, but they are cumbersome and rarely successful. For example, a discharge petition to remove a bill from a committee and bring it to the floor requires the signatures of an absolute majority of the House (218 individuals). Between 1923 and 1975 only twenty-five petitions of 396 filed received the necessary signatures."

The positive power of committees in the Rayburn House lay in their ability to make proposals to the floor. The sanctity of these proposals is suggested by the high percentage of all committee bills that passed entirely unamended. Ripley (1983, 200), for example, reports an average figure of 70 percent for the period from 1963-71.

The explanation of why committees were so infrequently reversed on the floor during the era of "committee government" has usually hinged on notions of reciprocity, specialization, and expertise. Reciprocity refers to a norm of mutually beneficial forbearance on the floor: for example, even if a particular committee occasionally refused to report a bill that a majority on the floor wished to see reported, the members of that majority might not have insisted on their majoritarian rights in the expectation that their own committees would be given similar deference in the future. Everyone benefited from such reciprocal deference as long as the members of each committee valued influence over their own committee's jurisdiction more highly than they did influence over the average of the other committees' jurisdictions.[16]

Another factor often cited as contributing to the sanctity of committee decisions was a generalized respect for expertise--for the members who "had specialized in the area, had worked hard, and had the facts" (Fenno 1962, 316). If everyone specialized in their own committee's affairs, then necessarily they would be less well informed about bills pending before other committees, hence more dependent for pertinent information on the "experts" in other committees.[17]

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[16] For a characterization of the 'universalism" model of Congress, see Weingast (1979); Shepsle and Weingast (1981); Fiorina (1981).

[17] . There are other theories of why committees are powerful, notably Shepsle and Weingast's (1987a; 1987b) model of the "ex post veto." But the standard view is based either on reciprocity or the informational advantages of committee experts over their floor colleagues, or both.

2.2 The Distinctiveness of Committees

The sanctity of committee decisions in the Rayburn House might not have mattered much had committees been faithful mirrors of the floor. But the dominant view of the committee assignment process in the Rayburn House is that it accommodated member requests (Gertzog 1976; Shepsle 1978). Indeed, this is the dominant view of the assignment process in the contemporary House as well. Because members throughout the postwar period have sought constituency-relevant assignments, the story goes, accommodation of their requests has had predictable results:

> Committees and subcommittees are not collections of legislators representing diverse views from across the nation or collections of disinterested members who develop objective policy expertise. Rather, committees and subcommittees are populated by legislators who have the highest stake in a given policy jurisdiction, what we have termed "preference outliers." Hence, farm-state members of Congress dominate the agriculture committees; urban legislators predominate on the banking, housing and social welfare committees; members with military bases and defense industries in their districts are found on the armed services committees; and westerners are disproportionately represented on the public works, natural resources, and environmental committees. (Shepsle and Weingast 1984, 351)

From this perspective, the unrepresentativeness of committee membership, together with the sanctity of committee decisions, provided (and still provides) an ideal environment for special interests. By concentrating on a few relevant committees, special interests could (and still can) influence selected policies, without needing to influence

either policy in general or Congress in general--both considerably more daunting tasks. One of the key concepts in the literature on Congress--the notion of a "subgovernment"--was developed to describe the resulting policy process, in which a committee, an executive agency, and a client industry cooperate first in drafting policy in a given area, and then in pushing it past a deferential Congress. The literature on subgovernments is vast, and the dominant view is of policy made by largely unrepresentative and mostly unsupervised members, in cooperation with interested external actors.

2.3 The Autonomy of Subcommittees

The notion of a subgovernment of course presumes a considerable degree of committee autonomy from the floor. If committees were clearly the creatures of the floor, as they were in the early years of the Republic, then much of the force of the subgovernment literature would vanish.

The foundation stones of committee autonomy are usually taken to be the seniority system and the fixity of committee jurisdictions. The seniority system ensures a substantial degree of continuity in committee personnel and well-defined jurisdictions ensure similar continuity in the legislative areas over which committees exercise influence.

Sinclair (1989, 310) outlines the importance of the seniority system in this way: “By the 1920’s seniority had become the sole criterion for appointment to chairmanships, and as a result, chairmanships became independent positions of power over which the majority party had little control.” Dodd and Oppenheimer (1977, 40) voice an even

stronger view, questioning not just the parties' power of removal but also the amount of discretion that they could exert at the initial appointment stage:

> Throughout most of the postwar years ... power in Congress has rested in the committees or, increasingly, in the subcommittees. Although the party caucuses nominally have had the power to organize [i.e., appoint] committees and select committee chairpeople, the norm of congressional or state delegation seniority has dominated the former (though not exclusively), while the norm of committee seniority has dominated the latter (exclusively).

Committees, insulated from partisan tinkering with their membership by the seniority norm and other norms regulating the appointment process, and enjoying statutorily fixed jurisdictions, were often "singularly unaffected by ties to ... party" (Cater 1964, 153).

2.4 Summary

To sum up the standard view, power in the Rayburn House was clearly decentralized. On one side stood the House committees, characterized by their power, distinctiveness, and autonomy. Their power was protected by far-reaching norms of reciprocity on the floor and by mutual respect for expertise. Their distinctiveness stemmed both from the process of committee assignment, which produced members on each panel who were largely self-selected, and from the process of pluralistic politics, which produced external influences on each panel that were entirely self-selected. Their autonomy was buttressed both by the seniority system, which protected members from removal, and by the fixity of their jurisdictions.

On the other side stood the parties. They seemed no longer able--perhaps no longer willing--to use the committee assignment process in a systematically partisan

fashion and, consequently, their influence was confined to the floor. Even their ability to hold together on the floor, moreover, was poor and getting worse.

Such a short summary of decades of research cannot do justice to the diversity of views and nuances of argument present in the literature. But our summary is faithful, we think, to the main features of "committee government" as it is portrayed in the literature. Moreover, many scholars would accept large portions of the account as accurate for the 1970s and '80s, with subcommittees taking the place of committees.

3. An Outline of the Book

Any account of the postwar House that, like ours, emphasizes the role of parties must inevitably take account of the previous literature's overwhelming emphasis on committees. Accordingly, we begin in Part II by reviewing the committee government model, probing two of its key premises--that committees are autonomous and that they are distinctive in terms of the preferences of their members.

In the rest of the book, we turn from the negative task of criticizing the committee government model to the positive task of articulating an alternative model, one of limited party government. In part 2 we offer a theory of what parties are and how they might, in certain circumstances, act in a unitary fashion. We first provide a general survey of neo-institutional theories of organization, including under that rubric some recent interpretations of Hobbes' theory of the state, various models of business firms from the industrial organization literature, and studies of political entrepreneurship. We then adapt the general neo-institutional approach, in which organizations are viewed as solutions to collective dilemmas, to the specific case of legislative parties.

In part 3 we consider parties as floor coalitions. We review one of the main bodies of data--roll call votes on the floor of the House--underpinning the party decline thesis, from the perspective of the theory developed in Part 2. We are led to measure party strength in a different fashion than the previous literature, to different empirical findings (the decline of majority party strength has been neither steady nor statistically significant in the post-New Deal period), and to different interpretations of the role of party on the floor.

In the last two parts of the book we consider parties as procedural coalitions. Part V focuses on their influence over appointments to committees, furnishing statistical evidence that loyalty to party leaders influences not just the probability of receiving a desirable transfer but also the probability of getting an attractive appointment as a freshman. Part VI looks at a different aspect of procedural power--the power to set the legislative agenda. We consider one model that emphasizes how committees compete for scarce time on the floor, in the process anticipating the desires of the majority party leadership, and another that highlights the veto power held collectively by members of the majority party. Part VII concludes.