

Is Being on the House Rules Committee Still Valuable?*

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Abstract

Key to the maintenance of the ‘party cartel’ in the House of Representatives is the House Committee on Rules. This committee, traditionally thought of as a prestigious committee, has been increasingly under the yoke of party leadership and provides little in the way of individual policy benefits to its committee members. This paper examines other potential benefits that Rules Committee members can receive, such as indirect policy benefits via the special rule process, boosts in campaign finance, institutional promotion, and post-Congress career outcomes. I find statistically significant but substantively minor evidence that committee members have discretion over which bills receive special rules and no evidence that Rules Committee membership provides other individualized benefits. The evidence suggests that the committee is less valuable to individual members than previously thought and, combined with other recent research on the benefits of committee positions, is congruent with the theory that the centralization of the policy-making process cuts individuals, particularly rank-and-file members of Congress, out of the process.

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Introduction

The U.S. House of Representatives is an overwhelmingly partisan institution. Unlike in the bipartisan post-war era, the House is today characterized by the dominance of the majority party in almost all aspects, including formal positions of power and agenda control (Gailmard and Jenkins 2007, Young and Wilkins 2007, Finocchiaro and Rohde 2008). In their landmark book *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*, Cox and McCubbins develop a theory of the organization of the House, outlining what they describe as the ‘party cartel’— an institutional arrangement wherein the majority party takes control of the levers of power of the chamber, such as committee assignments, agenda control, and disbursement of policy/pork rewards, and disproportionately disburses these benefits amongst their party caucus to win and keep their support (Cox and McCubbins 1993, Cox and McCubbins 2007). Alongside these individualized benefits, the party also skews the legislative agenda to its benefit which creates a ‘party brand’ that majority party members collectively benefit from.

Key to the maintenance of the party cartel is the House Committee on Rules (hereby referred to as the Rules Committee). This committee, colloquially known as the ‘traffic cop of the House of Representatives’, is endowed with the power of scheduling consideration of, and structuring debate on, legislation through ‘special rules’. The committee’s control over the legislative agenda gives it a lot of power, and this power is implicitly acknowledged within the caucus rules of each party by restricting members from sitting on both the Rules Committee and other ‘exclusive’ committees such as Appropriations and Ways and Means (Frisch and Kelly 2006). Yet, the committee is also viewed as an arm of majority party leadership with scant independent power— the committee is stacked with a 9-4 majority for the majority party, the Speaker of the House controls the nomination of candidates for the committee, and the special rules passed by the committee are skewed towards the interests of majority party leaders (Bryan W Marshall 2002a, Bryan W. Marshall 2019, Michael S. Lynch, Madonna, and Vick 2020). The Rules Committee rarely considers legislation of its own, either, giving members few opportunities to advance their own legislative interests in the committee. The Rules Committee has also seen a decline in

its perceived ‘prestige’ by members of the House, indicated by the decreasing seniority of members on the committee, higher transfer rates, and declining number of committee staff (Curry and Gloekler 2009, Stewart III 2018, Petersen 2021). The committee, therefore, has the dual nature of being indispensable to the maintenance of the party cartel while seemingly providing little policy discretion in the modern era.

This begs the question— what individualized benefits do members of the Rules Committee receive and why? If the committee is so important to the majority party yet has less to offer in terms of policy benefits than an average committee, are there other benefits that compensate Rules Committee members in return? This question is particularly important for members, as there are significant opportunity costs to serving on Rules over another committee— although there are more ‘exclusivity’ violations in the modern era (i.e. members serving on Rules and at least one other committee), serving on the committee still takes significant time and effort, especially for majority party members, that could be used elsewhere on a different committee. Drawing from Fenno’s axiomatic goals of members of Congress, that being re-election, policy, and institutional power (Fenno 1973), I posit that the Rules Committee provides its members, specifically those of the majority party, indirect policy benefits through the ability to privilege legislation via special rule consideration. These indirect policy benefits are conditioned on the legislation being congruent with majority party interests due to the committee’s nature as an arm of the majority party, limiting these benefits to majority party members of the committee. I also posit that unique features of the Rules Committee that distinguish it from other committees, including the role it serves in promoting majority party interests, the knowledge and connections members gain from the committee through drafting rules & holding hearings on a wide range of high-profile and impactful legislation, as well as the position taking opportunities offered in the hearings, grant members other individualized benefits that target their goals, including re-election, institutional power, as well as the separate goal of post-Congressional careers.

Using original data on bills considered via special rules from the 105th to 115th Congress, I find statistically significant evidence that special rules provide some amount

of latent policy benefits to majority party Rules Committee members, yet the effect is substantively insignificant and does not fully replace the loss induced by the Rules Committee rarely considering legislation of its own, which removes an avenue for members to produce and develop legislation that works towards their policy goals. I also assess the effect of Rules Committee membership on leadership PAC formation and disbursement, campaign fundraising, post-Congress lobbying careers as well as the likelihood of becoming an elected party leader later on in one's congressional career, all with null results.

The null and substantively insignificant findings imply that Rules Committee membership provides no more individualized benefits than the average committee in the House of Representatives, contrasting with the committee's 'exclusive' nature and its historic role as an independent center of power in the chamber. Although previous work had provided descriptive evidence that was indicative of the Rules Committee's decline in power and prestige in the form of committee seniority and transfer rate (Curry and Gloekler 2009, Stewart III 2018), this paper is the first to systematically test the relative power, prestige, and influence of the Rules Committee and tie in these empirical patterns with existing theories of committees and parties in the House of Representatives. The evidence presented is consistent with the notion that the committee's meager benefits 'screen out' potentially disloyal members and leave behind the members whom are most invested in the collective party brand benefits that the committee generates, thus the most loyal members that party leaders can rely on to uphold the party cartel. The 118th Congress illustrates the dangers of having disloyal members on the Rules Committee— as part of a bargain with far-right members of his conference to win their support for his speakership bid, Speaker McCarthy appointed three arch-conservative members to the committee, Chip Roy, Thomas Massie, and Ralph Norman, giving them the balance of power in the committee in conjunction with the four Democrats (Kight 2023). These members have disregarded the wishes of majority party leaders and voted down several rules for important legislation, forcing current Speaker Johnson to seek Democratic votes on key legislation through the suspension of the rules procedure (Feldman 2024). Combined with the evidence put forward by previous work that leverages within-member variation

to analyze committee benefits (Berry and Fowler 2016, Berry and Fowler 2018), I also posit that formal institutions in the House, particularly committees, explain less variation in power & influence amongst rank-and-file members than previously thought, and that power in the House has centralized in the hands of party leaders and committee chairs in the last few decades.

Rules Committee & the Party Cartel

Historically, and even to this day, the Rules Committee has been known as one of the ‘prestige’ committees in the House of Representatives (Bryan W Marshall 2002a, Bryan W. Marshall 2019, Michael S. Lynch, Madonna, and Vick 2020). The committee is endowed with significant influence through their role as the ‘traffic cop’ of the House of Representatives, specifically through the use of special rules to structure debate and amendments on key legislation. The committee is key for controlling the agenda and has, in the past, used its influence to skew policy towards its preferences, especially in the ‘Textbook Congress’ era from the 1930s to the 1970s when the committee was stacked with conservative southern Democrats with sharply divergent views from the median Democrat in the House (Schickler and Pearson 2009). Schickler (2001) describes the Rules Committee during this time period as “the principal institutional power base in the House for the cross-party conservative coalition” (163), aided by the committee’s lifetime appointments and a cross-partisan conservative majority on the committee, which used its agenda-setting power to both block consideration of liberal legislation supported by party leaders, including major civil rights bills (Schickler 2001, Cox and McCubbins 2005).

However, the story is significantly different today— the Rules Committee is now viewed as an agent of party leadership that’s key to the maintenance of the majority party’s control of the legislative process. This shift in the role of the committee began in December of 1974, when the House Democratic Caucus voted 146-122 to allow the Speaker to nominate Democratic Rules Committee members, subject to a confirmation vote by the whole caucus (Schickler 2001). This change, coupled with other reforms to the selection of committee chairs and members around the same time, came about as a result of angst

amongst liberal Democrats over the gatekeeping abilities of predominantly southern and conservative committee chairs as well as the Rules Committee. These changes significantly empowered both majority party leadership in the House as well as the liberal majority of the Democratic caucus through mitigating the agenda-setting powers of these conservative Democrats on the Rules Committee, and when the Republicans took control of the House for the first time in decades in 1995, they kept these Rules Committee reforms in place.

The Rules Committee today, while invaluable for the maintenance of the party cartel, has relatively little in the way of direct policy benefits for its members. Unlike an average committee, the Rules Committee considers very few, if any, original jurisdiction bills within a given congressional term. The vast majority of the committee's time is spent designing special rules to structure floor consideration for legislation from other committees. Special rules have a two-fold purpose— they put legislation at the 'front of the line' on the legislative calendar and they structure the terms of debate for a bill, typically restricting amendments as a way to keep members from attaching dangerous riders that would tank the bill. These rules also allow for bills to pass the House with a simple majority vote, unlike Suspension of the Rules, the other main pathway for legislation in the House of Representatives, which requires that bills pass with a 2/3rds majority vote. Therefore, most high-profile and highly partisan bills are considered with a special rule, giving the Rules Committee a crucial role in setting the agenda for the most important bills for the majority party.

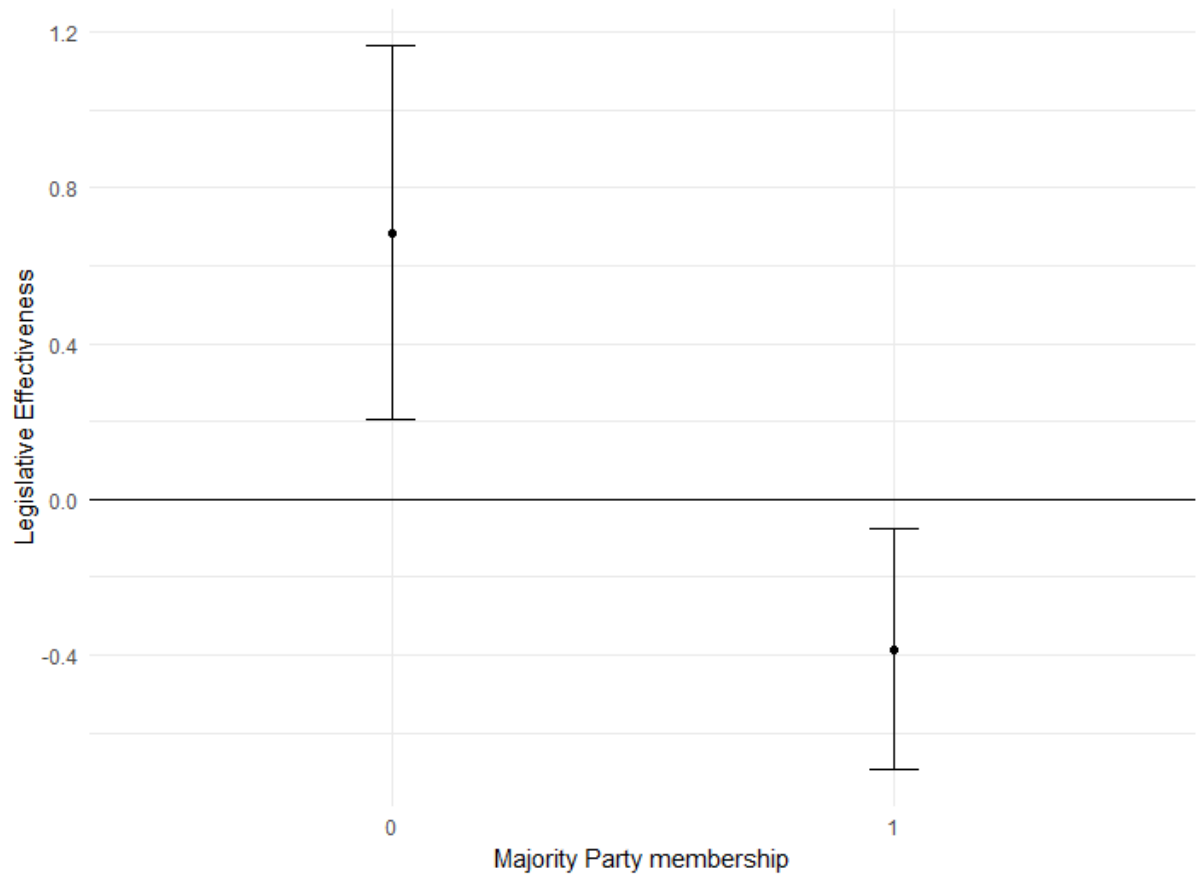
While this is a very important function for the party as a whole, it doesn't provide the same individual opportunities to draft and mark-up legislation that a typical standing committee does. Members of the committee generally have their 'hands' on legislation at a later stage in the legislative process than other committees, giving them fewer opportunities to affect the content of legislation. This lack of direct policy benefits is potentially reflected in a decline in perceived prestige of the Rules Committee, with the average seniority of the committee declining over the decades and more members choosing to transfer out of what was once a very powerful committee (Curry and Gloekler 2009, Stewart III 2018).

To empirically assess the policy benefits, or lack thereof, of Rules Committee membership, I implement a series of two-way fixed-effects models assessing the impact of Rules Committee membership on legislative effectiveness drawn from the 105th to 115th Congresses. The outcome variable, legislative effectiveness, is drawn from the Volden and Wiseman Legislative Effectiveness dataset (Volden and Wiseman 2014). Legislative effectiveness is a variable constructed for each member-Congress pair that assesses how far each of a member's bills gets through each stage of the legislative process, from introduction to committee consideration all the way to being signed into law. Bills are weighted by their substance and significance, with substantive & significant bills receiving a higher weight than commemorative bills. Committee membership data is drawn from Stewart and Woon's committee roster dataset (Stewart III and Woon 2017).

Table 1: Estimating the effects of Rules Committee membership on Legislative Effectiveness

	Legislative Effectiveness		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Rules Committee Membership	0.005 (0.209)	-0.231 (0.195)	0.685*** (0.265)
Majority Party		0.840*** (0.041)	0.863*** (0.042)
Rules Committee Membership x Majority Party			-1.070*** (0.235)
Committee Chair		2.777*** (0.273)	2.805*** (0.271)
Seniority		-0.025 (0.033)	-0.027 (0.033)
Only on Rules		-0.071 (0.052)	-0.072 (0.053)
Observations	5,695	5,695	5,695
R ²	0.00000	0.335	0.338
Member and Time F.E.	✓	✓	✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Figure 1: AME of Rules Committee Membership on Legislative Effectiveness by Majority Party Membership (105th-115th Congresses)



As illustrated above in models 1 and 2 in Table 1, Rules Committee membership has no statistically significant effect on legislative effectiveness. That, in of itself, implies that the Rules Committee leads to no significant increase or decrease in legislative effectiveness. However, since the committee's powers are used to advance the interests of the majority party, it is important to parse out the effect conditional on being in the majority party. Model 3 illustrates the negative effect of the interaction term of majority party membership and Rules Committee membership and Figure 3 shows that, when a member is in the majority party, being a member of the Rules Committee significantly decreases a member's legislative effectiveness. This is to be expected—the outcome variable measures how far a members' sponsored legislation makes it through the legislative process, and the Rules Committee, as stated earlier, considers very little of its own original jurisdiction legislation—therefore, being a member of the committee, particularly a majority party member, could be considered a 'wasted' committee assignment with respect to getting one's own legislation through the legislative process. As for the positive effect amongst minority party members of the committee, I posit that these members, being almost entirely shut out of the substantive work of the committee, are able to focus on their legislative efforts in their other committee assignments in a way that majority party members cannot due to their need to be involved in Rules Committee business as agents of the majority party.

The results here should not be taken as a causal estimate of the effect of Rules Committee membership on legislative effectiveness—The committee does not consider much, if any, original jurisdiction legislation, biasing the results towards ineffectiveness amongst members on the committee. Rather, these results are intended to be illustrative of the limitations of Rules Committee membership relative to other committees.

The committee, therefore, has the dual nature of being invaluable for the party as a whole but being an inferior committee assignment for an individual member, at least from an individual policy perspective. Party leaders have to make sure that these members don't have too much discretion over the legislative agenda, lest they become a locus of power in of themselves and become a thorn in the side of leadership just like they were

in the mid-20th century and currently are in the 118th Congress. The key to balancing these two competing interests may lie in the special rule process, which I explain in more detail in the following section.

Special Rules & Committee Bypass

Committee consideration of legislation is a hallmark of ‘regular order’ in the House of Representatives. This typically involves a bill being put on the committee calendar by the committee chair for consideration, with the bill undergoing rounds of hearings and mark-ups before receiving a vote amongst committee members, receiving a committee report that provides information about the legislation to the parent chamber, and then being referred to said chamber for a final round of hearings, markups, and votes before being sent to the other legislative chamber for the process to repeat itself again.

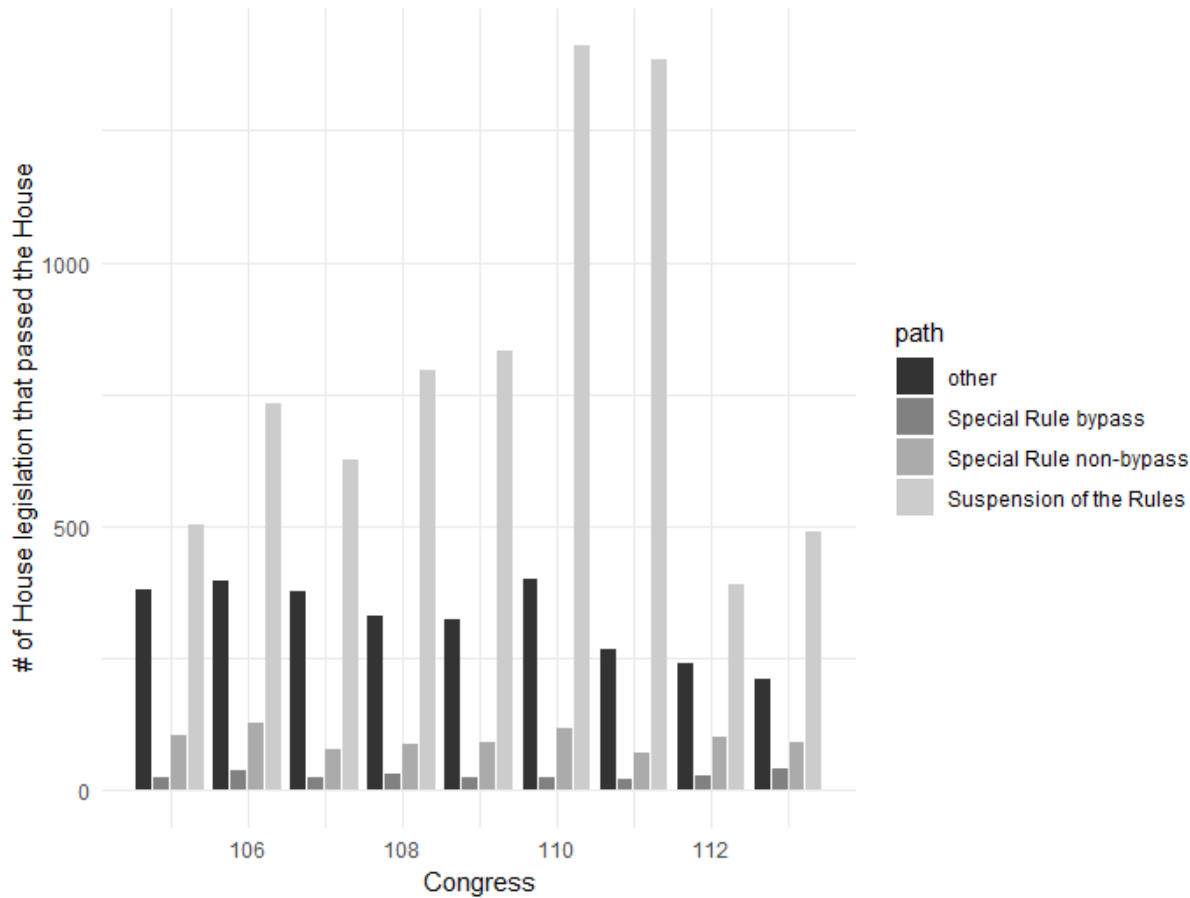
An important feature of this process is the ability for members of Congress, Congressional staffers, lobbyists and the public to receive information about a bill well before the bill goes to the floor for a final passage vote. If non-Congress actors find a bill to be unacceptable, the transparency of this process gives them time to mobilize opposition to the bill through lobbying members of Congress and mobilizing public opposition to the bill, and if members of Congress find a bill unacceptable, these members can pressure other members who support the bill to withdraw support or submit amendments changing problematic aspects of the bill. More time spent in the legislative process means more eyes on the bill, which means more opportunities for opposition, both within and outside Congress, to mobilize.

One method to quickly push legislation through the legislative process is to have it bypass committee consideration altogether. There are three ways this can occur: the discharge petition, suspension of the rules, and bypass via special rules (Sinclair 2017). Special rule bypass is unique in that it doesn’t require a bill to have 2/3rds majority support for final passage unlike suspension of the rules and that the procedure routes itself through the House Committee on Rules (*Special Rule Process* 2019). It occurs through the Rules Committee introducing a resolution that orders a bill currently in committee to be

‘in order’ to be considered on the floor of the House, passing it through their committee and then having the resolution pass on the floor of the House, where special rules are considered ‘privileged matters’ and will be taken up for consideration out of order (Davis 2019, Davis 2022). Once this special rule is passed, the bill can subsequently be considered on the floor, regardless of whether the committee has reported the bill out of committee or not.

Most legislation that bypasses committee consideration, let alone passes the House of Representatives at all, is through suspension of the rules. Figure 2 shows the count of all legislation that originated in, and was passed in, the House of Representatives, considered through four pathways of interest: Suspension of the rules, special rule consideration with and without bypassing committee, and other pathways (primarily through unanimous consent or regular order consideration).

Figure 2: Pathways through the legislative process for legislation that passed the House (105th-113th Congresses)



However, as stated above, suspension bills must be passed with a 2/3rds majority vote. Reaching this 2/3rds threshold on divisive and high-profile issues is difficult, particularly since legislative majorities in the House of Representatives tend to be quite small (Frances E. Lee 2016). Therefore, most major legislation is considered via a special rule, giving the procedure outsized weight despite the numerical majority of bills passing through other methods. Some notable pieces of legislation that bypassed committee via a special rule in the House of Representatives include the American Recovery and Investment Act of 2009, which was President Obama's landmark stimulus package in 2009 that appropriated \$800+ billion to stimulate the economy in the aftermath of the Great Recession (GAO 2019), the Respect for Marriage Act, which provided federal recognition of same-sex and interracial marriages for the first time and extended full faith and credit to same-sex marriages performed out-of-state, the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001, which was the first of two major tax cut bills under President Bush that shifted the overall tax burden towards lower-income Americans (Horton 2017), as well as the Affordable Health Care for America Act, which was the House version of what would later become the Affordable Care Act (which notably contained a 'public option' healthcare plan that was later axed in negotiations with the Senate) (Dunham 2010).

The Rules Committee, through their ability to propose special rules and extract bills out of committee, has a method of positive agenda control that's oft overlooked in the Congress literature compared to their ability to block legislation or restrict amendments & floor debate on legislation (Bach and Smith 1988, Sinclair 1994, Schickler and Pearson 2009). In lieu of the policy domain of a typical committee, the ability of the Rules Committee to 'privilege' certain bills via special rules & special rule committee bypass could make being on the committee more appealing to members by giving them some indirect influence on which bills receive special rules. However, all special rules, including those that authorize a bill to bypass committee consideration, must first be approved by the entire House, typically through a strict party-line vote. This, combined with the Speaker and Minority Leaders' control over the committee roster, imply that there are

limits on what the Rules Committee can do with their agenda setting power, specifically that the bills receiving special rules must be compatible with the interests of the majority party. In sum, I posit that Rules Committee members in the majority party can use their influence over the legislative agenda, granted to them via their committee's agenda setting powers, to disproportionately push forward bills of interest to them, conditional on the bill being congruent with majority party interests. From this, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Bills that are sponsored by a majority party member of the Rules Committee are more likely to be considered under a special rule than bills that are not.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Bills that are sponsored by a majority party member of the Rules Committee are more likely to bypass committee via special rule extraction than bills that are not.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Bills that are cosponsored by a majority party member of the Rules Committee and sponsored by a member of the majority party are more likely to be considered under a special rule than bills that are not.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4): *Bills that are cosponsored by a majority party member of the Rules Committee and sponsored by a member of the majority party are more likely to bypass committee via special rule extraction than bills that are not.*

To estimate the ability of Rules Committee members to extract 'rents' from their position through special rules and committee extraction, I implement several interactive fixed effects regressions that isolate the effect of Rules Committee 'interest' in a bill (operationalized as bill sponsorship or bill cosponsorship) on the bill's likelihood to receive a special rule and to bypass committee via special rule extraction. I use an original dataset of all bills that received a special rule in the House of Representatives in the 105th to 115th Congresses, covering a timespan of 22 years (1997-2018). My dataset, through hand-coding with a team of RAs, assesses whether each bill that received a special rule bypassed committee by looking at whether the bill was reported out of committee on

congress.gov. This yielded a dataset of 1612 unique bills considered under a special rule from the 105th to 115th Congress, with 1556 of these bills originating from the House of Representatives, and 437 unique bills bypassing committee, including 384 bills originating from the House of Representatives.

To focus my analysis on the most substantive bills, I subset my data to just House Bills, or HR bills for short. Most major legislation introduced in the House, with the exception of bills like continuing resolutions, are in HR bills. I also subset for important bills, which is a covariate in the Congressional Bills Project that primarily excludes minor bills like those renaming post offices. Finally, I subset to bills with major topic codes. There are 21 major topic areas in the Congressional Bills Project dataset, many of which are closely connected to a committee's 'turf', so to speak (i.e. Agriculture is both a major topic code and a committee in the House of Representatives). In the absence of data that connects each bill with the committee(s) it was referred to, major topic area will serve as an imperfect substitute for the purposes of implementing fixed effects that control for unobserved committee-specific dynamics that may affect the results. This leaves me with a dataset of 53,890 bills for this analysis.

The independent variables of interest are whether a bill was sponsored by a majority party member of the Rules Committee for Hypotheses 1 and 2, represented by the interaction term for Rules Sponsorship and Majority Party Sponsorship, as well as the interaction term of Majority Rules Cosponsorship and Majority Party Sponsorship for Hypotheses 3 and 4. Substantively, the latter captures the effect on a bill when both the Rules Committee member that cosponsors the bill and the sponsor of the bill are from the majority party. Rules Committee members were identified using Stewart and Woon's committee roster dataset and sponsorship data was collected directly from congress.gov (Stewart III and Woon 2017). Since I expect that majority rules cosponsorship should only have an effect on whether the bill bypasses committee when the bill is condorcet with majority party interests, this interaction term should be positive and significant. The outcome variable is whether a bill received a special rule, which is usually tantamount to passing the House since the special rule has to be adopted by a floor vote, as

well as whether a bill was ‘extracted’ from committee prematurely via a special rule.

I also add control variables, including whether a majority party leader cosponsored the bill drawn from congress.gov, the total number of cosponsors a bill has, whether a bill is one of the first 10 bills reserved to be introduced by party leadership, as well as whether a bill was sponsored by a committee chair. These variables are collected from the Congressional Bills Project (Adler and Wilkerson 2017-2018) and will help isolate the interests of other actors in the chamber and permit analysis of the independent interests of Rules Committee members. The results are presented in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Estimating the effects of Majority Party Rules Committee sponsorship on bill outcomes

	Received a special rule		Bypassed Committee via Special Rule Extraction	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Rules Sponsorship	−0.006 (0.005)	−0.003*** (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)	−0.00002 (0.0003)
Majority Party Sponsorship	0.023*** (0.002)	0.023*** (0.002)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
RulesSpon x MajPartySpon		−0.004 (0.006)		0.003 (0.003)
Majority Leader Cosponsorship	0.106*** (0.010)	0.106*** (0.010)	0.027*** (0.006)	0.027*** (0.006)
# of Cosponsors	0.0001*** (0.00003)	0.0001*** (0.00003)	0.00001 (0.00001)	0.00001 (0.00001)
Leadership Bill	0.599*** (0.066)	0.599*** (0.066)	0.232*** (0.048)	0.232*** (0.048)
Committee Chair Sponsorship	0.053*** (0.006)	0.053*** (0.006)	0.014*** (0.002)	0.014*** (0.002)
Observations	53,890	53,890	53,890	53,890
R ²	0.071	0.071	0.034	0.034
Topic x Congress F.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors are clustered by bill sponsor.

Table 3: Estimating the effects of Majority Party Rules Committee cosponsorship on bill outcomes

	Received a special rule		Bypassed Committee via Special Rule Extraction	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Majority Rules Cosponsorship	0.012*** (0.004)	−0.002 (0.002)	0.002* (0.001)	−0.0004 (0.001)
Majority Party Sponsorship	0.021*** (0.002)	0.019*** (0.002)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)
MajRulesCosp x MajPartySpon		0.016*** (0.005)		0.003* (0.001)
Majority Leader Cosponsorship	0.104*** (0.010)	0.103*** (0.010)	0.027*** (0.006)	0.026*** (0.006)
# of Cosponsors	0.0001*** (0.00003)	0.0001*** (0.00003)	−0.00000 (0.00001)	−0.00000 (0.00001)
Leadership Bill	0.598*** (0.066)	0.598*** (0.066)	0.232*** (0.048)	0.231*** (0.048)
Committee Chair Sponsorship	0.053*** (0.006)	0.053*** (0.006)	0.014*** (0.002)	0.014*** (0.002)
Observations	53,890	53,890	53,890	53,890
R ²	0.072	0.072	0.034	0.034
Topic x Congress F.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors are clustered by bill sponsor.

Models 1 and 2 in Table 3 demonstrate significant evidence of Rules Committee members having a degree of discretion over which bills receive special rules. The effect size is small, but it is important to note that a bill receiving a special rule is, in most cases, tantamount to passing the House, since the special rule has to be approved by a majority vote on the floor. However, as shown in Table 2, a bill being sponsored by a majority party Rules Committee member does not increase the likelihood of a bill receiving a special rule or being extracted from committee. Likewise, contrary to the expectations in Hypothesis 4, Models 3 and 4 in Table 3 show that there is not enough evidence that Majority Rules cosponsorship has a significant impact on whether a bill bypasses committee via special rule extraction, although the sign is in the correct direction. This may be due to special rule extraction happening earlier in the legislative process than the typical special rule process—many bills that bypass committee via special rule extraction do so under very tight deadlines and receive a final passage vote within days of introduction, leaving little time for Rules Committee members, let alone any rank-and-file members, to read the bill and decide whether or not to cosponsor it. An ancillary analysis in Appendix A leverages suspension of the rules, a supermajoritarian method of considering legislation controlled by the Speaker without the involvement of the Rules Committee, to test the robustness of the significant finding in Models 1 and 2 of Table 3.

The results, while significant in the case of Hypothesis 3, are not particularly large in magnitude and likely do not paint the whole picture. Extracting latent policy benefits by privileging other members' bills that you take an interest in, while better than nothing, is still inferior to the potential policy and credit-claiming benefits that a member attains through using their position on a more normal committee to push their own legislation or amend legislation to their benefit.

Campaign Finance

The lack of significant policy benefits, direct or indirect, may point to there being a different source of benefits that Rules Committee members benefit from. Members of Congress must win elections to do their jobs in the first place—this sentiment of ‘re-

election first' is reflected in Mayhew's canonical book *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, with Mayhew employing the logic that members of Congress focus first and foremost on winning re-election in order to explain their behavior in office (Mayhew 2004). Mayhew divides these activities into three categories— advertising (building a brand image amongst constituents with non-ideological/political messages), credit claiming (claiming credit for something desirable/positive that the government has done), and position taking (staking a position on a relevant political issue), with these activities being strategically employed by members to boost their chances for re-election.

As mentioned earlier, the Rules Committee provides few credit claiming opportunities compared to other committees because of the committee's lack of original jurisdiction legislation, but the committee may serve as a prime position taking environment due to the breadth of legislation considered by the committee. Committee hearings on special rules provide ample opportunity for Rules Committee members to comment on the legislation being considered by the rules and have those comments be aired to interested audiences (Megan S. Lynch 2010), and the breadth and oftentimes high profile nature of legislation considered by special rules gives members a space to comment on most of the important and controversial legislation considered by the House. With the assumption that members will speak strategically on these bills in order to maximize their chances for re-election, it follows naturally that members will use these position taking opportunities to indirectly solicit campaign donations.

Campaign fundraising has become increasingly important for members of Congress in recent decades— elections are more expensive than ever and members are advised, by their own party leaders in Congress, to spend upwards of 4 hours a day making phone calls for campaign donations (Grim and Siddiqui 2013). Although the empirical literature has yet to make a definitive connection between campaign fundraising and electoral success, particularly in general elections (Abramowitz 1991, Gerber 1998, Stratmann 2005, Thomsen 2023), the long hours that members of Congress put into soliciting donations as well as the ballooning amount of money going into campaigns suggest that members put great value in fundraising and will likely view opportunities to fundraise as beneficial to

their re-election goals.

Considering the broad jurisdiction of the Rules Committee, the legislation that it considers, as well as the position taking opportunities that arise during special rule hearings, I draw the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): *Members who serve on the Rules Committee will raise more money than members who are not on the Rules Committee.*

An alternative explanation for the effect of Rules Committee membership on campaign fundraising is that Rules Committee members, with their committee’s broad jurisdiction and influence over the legislative agenda, are valuable to interest groups trying to ‘buy’ access to influential members of Congress. Other research has found that donors target legislators with agenda-setting power (Fourinaies 2018, Fourinaies and A. B. Hall 2018) and that members of Congress are significantly more likely to schedule meetings with donors than non-donors (Kalla and Broockman 2016). Considering the committee’s nature as the ‘scheduling arm of the majority party’ (*Conference Rules of the 118th Congress* 2023), it is likely that the value derived from the committee’s agenda-setting power & connections for lobbyists is limited to committee members of the majority party. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 6 (H6): *Majority party members who serve on the Rules Committee will raise more money than members who are not on the Rules Committee.*

To test these hypotheses, I employ a fixed-effects research design that assesses the effect of being on the Rules Committee on a member’s campaign fundraising. District and redistricting cycle interactive fixed effects are included to control for any variation in fundraising induced by a member running for a certain congressional district— this holds certain features of the electoral environment that may affect campaign fundraising, such as district competitiveness and the donor pool of district residents, constant. Drawing from Bonica’s Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections (DIME) dataset, I regress Rules Committee membership on the log amount of dollars raised from PACs and individual donations (Bonica 2023). I also control for seniority, whether the member is a

committee chair, the legislative effectiveness of the member, as well as the competitiveness of the district. The measure of district competitiveness is calculated by subtracting the district's most recent Democratic presidential vote share from 50 for Democrats and vice versa for Republicans, with higher values indicating that the district is less competitive. This data is drawn from Jacobson and Algara's Congressional Election Returns dataset (Jacobson and Algara 2024). To distinguish between the two potential mechanisms for Rules Committee membership's effect on campaign fundraising, I also specify interactive models that assess whether the benefits of committee membership are conditional on being in the majority party— if the effect is conditional on majority party status, it's more likely that the committee's benefits are driven through connections rather than public-facing position-taking behavior.

Table 4: Effect of Rules Committee Membership on Campaign Donations

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	log(PAC)	log(PAC)	log(Individual)	log(Individual)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Rules	0.171 (0.138)	0.340 (0.414)	0.174 (0.106)	0.232 (0.047)
Majority Party	0.125* (0.074)	0.130* (0.075)	0.066 (0.047)	0.068 (0.047)
Rules x Majority Party		-0.197 (0.454)		-0.067 (0.160)
Seniority	-0.007 (0.015)	-0.007 (0.015)	-0.007 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.010)
Committee Chair	0.141 (0.238)	0.149 (0.240)	0.171 (0.121)	0.174 (0.121)
Legislative Effectiveness	0.084** (0.033)	0.083** (0.033)	0.062*** (0.015)	0.062*** (0.015)
District Uncompetitiveness	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.017*** (0.006)	-0.017*** (0.006)
Observations	5,367	5,367	5,367	5,367
R ²	0.005	0.005	0.012	0.012
Member and Congress F.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓
District x Redistricting Cycle F.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors are clustered by member.

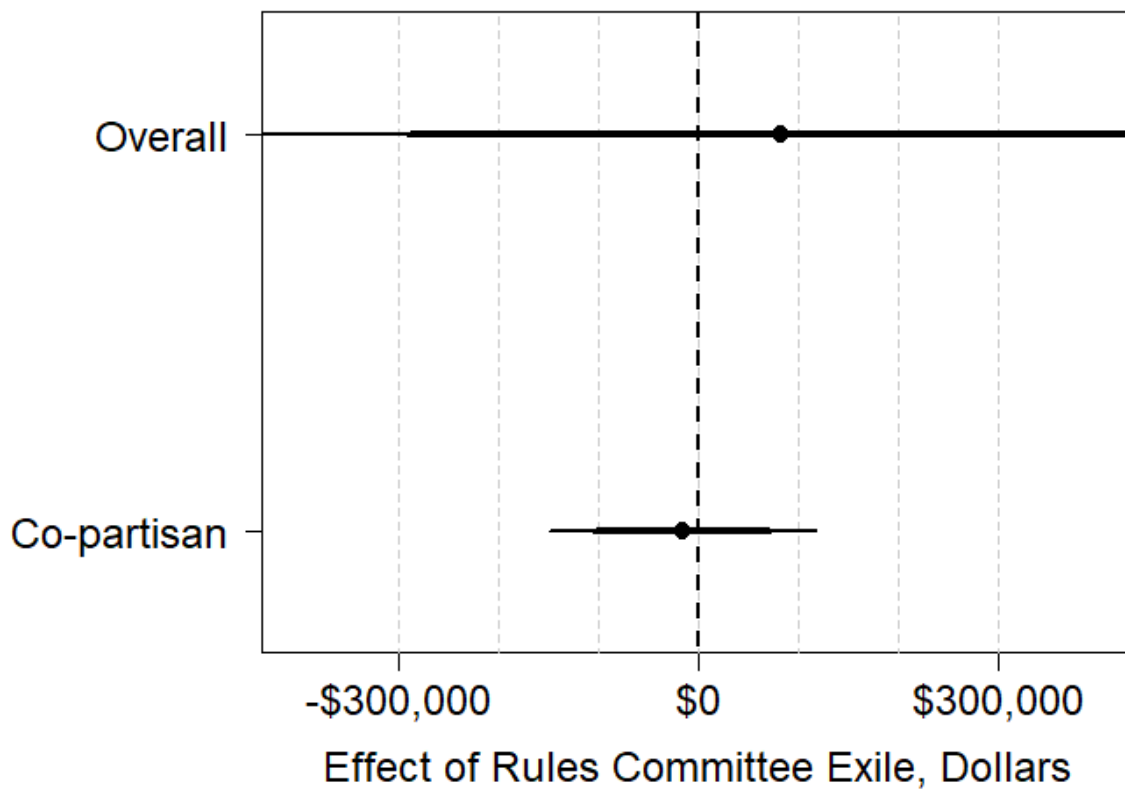
Table 4 shows no significant effects of Rules Committee membership on any measure of campaign fundraising regardless of the model specification or the outcome variable of interest. Neither mechanism is empirically supported. There could be competing interpretations of this, however— it could be that being on Rules perfectly makes up for the lost fundraising opportunities present in another committee, thus there may be an effect that is difficult to precisely estimate with this empirical approach. Appendix B contains alternative specifications of these models with and without the district and redistricting cycle interactive fixed effects, with similarly insignificant results.

To get closer to a true causal estimate of the effect of Rules Committee membership on campaign finance, I replicate the empirical analysis from Powell and Grimmer’s article entitled ‘Money in Exile: Campaign Contributions and Committee Access’ (Powell and Grimmer 2016). This article, alongside a previous article of theirs examining a more broad range of political outcomes for members of Congress (Grimmer and Powell 2013), use the plausibly exogenous instrument of changes in the party balance of committees after ‘wave’ elections that change the majority party in control of a given chamber in Congress to estimate the effects of committee membership. Exiled members are compared to non-exiled members who remained on the same committee in order to estimate the effects of losing a specific committee assignment. In the case of the Rules Committee, the committee always has a 9-4 ratio of majority party members to minority party members, meaning that five members are ‘exiled’ from the committee whenever the majority party changes in the House. The effect of exile, in their findings, is that exiled members receive a ‘subsidy’ for their loss of committee status from co-partisan PACs, which are PACs aligned with one of the two parties in Congress that has an interest in which party controls Congress, but these exiled members also lose money from industry PACs who donate to gain access to members on their committee of interest.

Because Rules has its hands on legislation from most committees yet has less substantive involvement than the committees of jurisdiction for a given bill, I expect that Rules membership will not have an industry specific effect like, for example, Energy and Commerce. Therefore, I focus on the effect of Rules Committee exile on overall PAC

donations and co-partisan PAC donations. If being on Rules gives members a boost to their campaign fundraising through the ability to appeal directly to donors with position taking behaviors during special rule hearings, I expect that exile will decrease the overall amount of money Rules Committee members receive and increase the amount received from co-partisan PACs as a way to compensate for their decreased fundraising capacity.

Figure 3: Effect of Rules Committee Exile on PAC Donations



As shown in figure 3, there is no statistically significant effect of Rules Committee exile on PAC donations. Given that members may adjust their behavior to compensate for the exile, I cannot conclude with certainty that the Rules Committee has a negative impact on a member's ability to fundraise, but considering that co-partisan PACs do not seem to increase their donations to exiled Rules members and the results in table 4, it appears unlikely that the Rules Committee has a significantly positive impact on members' ability to fundraise.

Party Promotion

If not policy or re-election, what, then, can be driving members to be on the Rules Committee? One of Fenno's other motivations for members in Congress is institutional promotion, i.e. seeking power within their chamber, whether it be through plum committee positions or party leadership positions (Fenno 1973). Being a committee chair grants formal agenda control power and greater access to staff and resources (R. L. Hall 1996, Berry and Fowler 2018, Oleszek et al. 2019), all valuable things for a member seeking re-election and aiming to implement their preferred policies. Likewise, being a party leader is also valuable for members seeking greater influence within the chamber— although much ink has been spilled about the importance (or lack thereof) of parties in Congress (Rohde 1991, Krehbiel 1991, Lebo, McGlynn, and Koger 2007, Patty 2008, just to name a few), party leaders are nonetheless endowed with a variety of formal and informal powers that render these positions valuable, including the agenda control powers of the Speaker as well as the fundraising and informal networks of power that party leaders are at the center of in the 21st century House.

However, not much is known about the career pathways of the Speaker of the House, let alone the other party leaders of importance, including the majority leader, party whip, caucus/conference chair, among others. In the case of the Speaker, the general trend is for the Speaker (or Minority Leader, the #1 position of the minority party in the House) to ascend to the position after serving as the #2 leader, which is either the Majority Leader or the Minority Whip (Jenkins and Stewart 2018). However, that doesn't account for most of the 20 or so years on average spent in the House before becoming speaker.

One reason members get elected or appointed to positions of power in the chamber is their fundraising prowess. As campaigns become more expensive, party leaders are increasingly expected to be effective fundraisers for their party (Cann 2008, Heberlig and Larson 2010, M. Currinder 2019). Through the formation of leadership PACs, which are specialized political action committees made by politicians for the purpose of redistributing campaign dollars to other politicians who need the money, members can contribute to their party's collective success and potentially gain more support for committee chair

or party leadership bids, which are decided by a majority vote of the party caucus or conference. Currinder, in her article ‘Leadership PAC Contribution Strategies and House Member Ambitions’, finds that members distribute leadership PAC funds according to a number of strategies, including the goal of advancement within the chamber, which is echoed by Kanthak’s finding that members aiming for leadership positions, either committee or party leadership, distribute their leadership PAC funds strategically to members to maximize their likelihood of forming a winning coalition (M. L. Currinder 2003, Kanthak 2007).

To that end, I theorize that the House Rules Committee, due to its unique nature as a heavily partisan committee key to the maintenance of the party cartel, provides an avenue for members to ‘audition’ for future party leadership promotions. Members, by slugging through committee service with little in the way of policy benefits for themselves but that is nonetheless invaluable for upholding the party cartel, are investing in their reputation as someone who is willing to put the goals of the party over their own personal policy goals. This reputation is made known to the rest of the chamber through their actions on the committee, which is unique among committees in that most major legislation from most committees will end up passing through the Rules Committee and receive a special rule there (Michael S. Lynch, Madonna, and Vick 2020, Davis 2022). Likewise, as campaign fund redistribution is necessary for forming winning coalitions for leadership positions, members on the committee who are auditioning will also focus more on forming leadership PACs and redistributing funds to secure their future winning coalition. From this, I derive the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 7 (H7): *Members who serve on the House Rules Committee are more likely to have leadership PACs than members who do not.*

Hypothesis 8 (H8): *Members who serve on the House Rules Committee will distribute more money through their leadership PAC than members who do not serve on the committee.*

Hypothesis 9 (H9): *Members who serve on the House Rules Committee are more likely to attain party leadership positions later in their careers.*

To test hypotheses 7 and 8, I utilize data from [opensecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org) cataloging leadership PAC expenditures among House members from 1999 to 2018. I specify a two-way fixed effects model where the dependent variable of interest is either having a leadership PAC in time t , where t corresponds to a given campaign cycle, or the amount of money disbursed through the leadership PAC in time t . For the latter, I subset my observations to just members of the House who have a leadership PAC at time t . The independent variable is whether a member is on the Rules Committee at time t . I control for seniority, committee chair status, as well as majority party status, as sources of potential endogeneity. Fixed effects are specified at the member and time level and standard errors are clustered at the member level and reported in parentheses.

Table 5: Effect of Rules Committee Membership on Leadership PAC outcomes

	Likelihood of having a leadership PAC		Logged dollars disbursed by leadership PAC	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Rules	−0.023 (0.056)	−0.027 (0.057)	0.360 (0.249)	0.262 (0.250)
Seniority		0.038** (0.016)		0.001 (0.120)
Committee Chair		0.084** (0.035)		0.322*** (0.116)
Majority Party		0.017 (0.013)		0.233*** (0.061)
Observations	5,709	5,709	2,424	2,424
R ²	0.0001	0.007	0.001	0.018
Member and Congress F.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors are clustered by member.

As shown in Table 5, there is no significant effect of Rules Committee membership on either having a leadership PAC or the amount disbursed by said leadership PAC. What this implies is that Rules Committee members do not engage in the type of coalition building in anticipation of future runs for party leadership positions more than the average House member. While they likely still engage in these activities, it seems unlikely that members with higher ambitions for leadership than the average member self-select onto the Rules Committee.

To test hypothesis 9, I examine members of Congress whose service began in the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) or later. I specify both a member fixed effects model and a two way fixed effects model. The outcome variable of interest is a member being a Party Leader in Congress t , with party leader data being drawn from the Center for Effective Lawmaking in their Legislative Effectiveness dataset, which is itself drawn from the Almanac of American Politics (Barone 2000, Volden and Wiseman 2014). Included in their operationalization of party leaders are the usual suspects like the Speaker and the Minority Leader, but also include whips, deputy whips, conference chairs and conference secretaries. The independent variable of interest is whether a member was on the Rules Committee at Congress $t - 1$ or before, with t referring to a two year Congress session. To control for any situations where a member attains a party leadership position before joining the Rules Committee, I also control for whether a member was a Party Leader at Congress $t - 2$ or before. I control for seniority and ideological distance from the majority party median to control for potential endogeneity. I use member and congress fixed effects to control for unchanging and unobserved variance that may endogenize the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, with all standard errors clustered at the member level and robust standard errors. The results are specified in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Effect of Rules Committee Membership on becoming a Party Leader

	Party Leader in Congress t	
	(1)	(2)
Rules ($t - 1$ or before)	0.052 (0.039)	0.053 (0.039)
Party Leader ($t - 2$ or before)	-0.019 (0.062)	-0.019 (0.062)
Seniority	0.009*** (0.002)	0.010*** (0.004)
Majority Party Median distance	-0.018 (0.014)	-0.018 (0.014)
Observations	3,340	3,340
R ²	0.017	0.004
Member F.E.	✓	✓
Congress F.E.		✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Standard errors are clustered by member.

Regardless of the model specification, there is not enough evidence to support the assertion that Rules Committee members are more likely to become party leaders later on in their careers. The most likely reason for this is the low power of the test— there are only so many members who ever join the Rules Committee or are elected to a party leadership position, thus making a quantitative analysis difficult. The operationalization of party leadership as solely high-ranking elected positions limits the analysis of unelected party leadership positions of interest that can be examined in this model. It is also worth noting that, at least according to the Republican Party conference rules in the 118th Congress, the chair of the House Committee on Rules is considered a ‘designated’ party leader— unique among all committee chairs in that regard (*Conference Rules of the 118th Congress* 2023). Regardless, it is unlikely that the Rules Committee is a sure-fire path to future party leadership positions.

Revolving-Door Lobbying

A unique feature of the Rules Committee is that most major legislation routes through the committee via the special rule process, including legislation from all House committees. This means that, although the committee is not directly involved with the drafting of most legislation, it holds hearings and drafts rules for a broad cross-section of legislation, particularly important legislation. The uniquely broad knowledge and connections formed through performing the duties of the committee may make members on the Rules Committee particularly valuable and/or effective lobbyists after they leave the chamber, in part because the comparative advantage of so-called ‘revolving door’ lobbyists is their political experience and connections (LaPira and Thomas 2014, LaPira and Thomas 2017, McCrain 2018, Strickland 2020).

If it is the case that Rules Committee experience creates more effective ‘revolving door’ lobbyists, combined with the demonstrated lack of individual benefits that Rules Committee service provides that may incentivize committee members to leave Congress early, thus making it more likely that said member will pursue a post-Congress career instead of retiring, I posit that members who have served on the Rules Committee will be more likely to become lobbyists after leaving the chamber and will also be more effective lobbyists. Relative to other former members of the House, the comparative advantage of Rules Committee members should be their breadth of connections and knowledge, which should translate into a larger number and diversity of clients. From this, I draw the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 10 (H10): *Among former members of the House of Representatives, those who have served on the Rules Committee are more likely to become lobbyists than those who have not.*

Hypothesis 11 (H11): *Among former members of the House of Representatives who have become lobbyists, those who have served on the Rules Committee will be more valuable than those who have not.*

Hypothesis 12 (H12): *Among former members of the House of Representatives who have become lobbyists, those who have served on the Rules Committee will serve more clients than those who have not.*

To test these hypotheses, I employ a simple OLS regression model assessing the effects of Rules Committee service on the outcome variables of interest. I draw data on the lobbying activities of former members of the House of Representatives from Ban et al. which examines the relationship between Congressional experience and the value of lobbyists (Ban, Palmer, and Schneer 2019). The dataset covers all members who left the House of Representatives from 1993 to 2012 (left, in this case, includes any means of departure, including retirement, death, and losing re-election) and codes the members who subsequently became lobbyists with their lobbying records. The outcome variables include whether a member became a lobbyist or not, the average number of annual clients served, as well as a measure of lobbyist value developed by Ban and coauthors that assesses the marginal increase in the cost of a contract by adding a given lobbyist (ex. the dollar amount increase in a contract by adding lobbyist B alongside lobbyist A compared to the dollar amount of the contract with lobbyist A alone) entitled *Lobbyist Value Added*. The independent variable is if a member of Congress served on the Rules Committee at any time in their congressional career. Controls are added for potential confounds, including other positions within the House that may influence lobbyist outcomes, the time in office served by a member, whether the member served on a non-Rules prestige committee, the party of the member, as well as the member's age upon leaving Congress.

Table 7: Effect of Rules Committee membership on post-Congress lobbying outcomes

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Became Lobbyist	Clients Per Year	log(Lobbyist Value Added)
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Rules	0.062 (0.121)	0.852 (2.741)	−5.285 (3.263)
Party Leader	0.348* (0.178)	0.675 (2.870)	0.390 (2.599)
Committee Chair	0.033 (0.078)	−1.212 (1.683)	−2.139 (1.632)
Committee Ranking Member	0.243*** (0.078)	2.224 (2.316)	0.568 (1.261)
ln(Time in Office)	0.065*** (0.023)	1.522* (0.801)	0.285 (0.601)
Republican	0.064* (0.034)	−0.301 (1.107)	−0.972 (0.736)
Prestige Committee	0.176*** (0.037)	2.893** (1.118)	−1.383* (0.738)
Age upon Leaving Congress	−0.009*** (0.002)	−0.119* (0.063)	−0.020 (0.042)
Constant	0.515*** (0.091)	7.770** (3.313)	12.127*** (2.345)
Observations	653	176	176
R ²	0.066	0.058	0.039
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

As shown in Model 1 of Table 7, the effect of being a member of the Rules Committee on becoming a lobbyist post-Congress is statistically insignificant, and the effect is likewise insignificant for both measures of lobbyist value, conditional on becoming a lobbyist, in Models 2 and 3. Although there are constraints with the cross-sectional nature of the data, the results imply that the constraints on Rules Committee service and the connections developed during committee service do not disproportionately lead former members into lobbying post-Congress and do not affect their ability/value as a lobbyist.

Selection Effects

One of the main problems that have plagued previous studies of committee assignment benefits is the inability to control for selection effects that endogenize the relationship between being on a committee and the benefits that one accrues, such as earmarks and federal outlays (Evans 1994, Frances E Lee 2003). Berry and Fowler, using data on earmarks per capita for senators in the 110th and 111th Congresses, find that senators who were on the Appropriations Committee in both Congresses and senators who only joined the committee in the 111th Congress exhibit almost the same rate of earmarks per capita, even in the 110th Congress, implying that any perceived benefits from being on the committee are entirely due to high-earmark-demanding senators self-selecting onto the committee rather than any intrinsic benefits of committee membership itself (Berry and Fowler 2016). One advantage of the within-member two-way fixed effects regression models implemented in the Berry and Fowler piece, as well as in most of the analyses in this paper, is its ability to control for some of these selection effects and more directly examine the effects of committee membership on individualized benefits. However, a limitation of the two-way fixed effects model is that the unit and time fixed effects do not control for unit-and-time varying unobservable variables (Imai and Kim 2021). Therefore, there remains the possibility that there are unobservables that vary within members and between time periods that endogenize the relationship between having a seat on the Rules Committee and the benefits that a member receives, thus reintroducing the possibility for some form of selection effects, which is why the two-way fixed effects analyses in this

paper cannot be taken as strictly causal.

To analyze these potential selection effects, I estimate three models— all three have seniority fixed effects to account for the non-linear relationship between seniority and receiving the treatment, model 2 has member fixed effects, and model 3 has member and Congress fixed effects. These models estimate the effects of certain predictors at Congress t on a member of the House joining the Rules Committee for the first time at Congress $t + 1$. Members who receive the treatment are subsequently dropped from the dataset, as are members who started their first term in the House on the Rules Committee. This modelling decision is to get a more accurate estimation of these committee members before joining the committee. I control for factors that may predict being selected as a Rules Committee member, such as seniority, ideological distance from the majority party, as well as members' Party Unity Score, which is a score assessing how often a member votes with their party on 'party unity' roll-call votes which have 50%+ of the majority party voting one way and 50%+ of the minority party voting the opposite (Lewis et al. 2024).

Table 8: Rules Committee Membership Selection Effects

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	First Rules Assignment at Congress $t + 1$		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Majority Party	0.004 (0.007)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.007 (0.008)
Majority Party Distance	0.0004 (0.012)	-0.006 (0.009)	-0.009 (0.012)
Legislative Effectiveness	-0.0001 (0.001)	-0.0002 (0.001)	-0.0003 (0.001)
Party Unity Score	0.0004** (0.0002)	0.00004 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)
District Uncompetitiveness	-0.00003 (0.0002)	0.00004 (0.0002)	0.00003 (0.0002)
log(Total Campaign Contributions)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.0002 (0.0001)	-0.0003 (0.0002)
Observations	2,425	2,425	2,425
R ²	0.008	0.009	0.009
Seniority F.E.	✓	✓	✓
Member F.E.		✓	✓
Congress F.E.			✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Standard errors are clustered by member.

Model 1 in Table 8 reports a positive effect of a member's Party Unity Score on receiving their first Rules assignment in Congress $t + 1$, albeit this effect is washed out in models 2 and 3 when member fixed effects are added. What this implies is that there is some unobservable variable that confounds the relationship between a member's Party Unity Score and their likelihood of being assigned to Rules that drives selection onto the committee. The evidence, paired with the understanding of the committee as heavily tied to party leadership, is congruent with this unobservable potentially being a member's unobserved connections to their party's leadership as well as how much the member

values the collective ‘party brand’ that the committee generates. These characteristics of members vary between members and could also vary within members over time, making them difficult to capture with a standard regression model, and likely highly correlate with a member’s Party Unity Score, given that they are all related to a similar concept of loyalty to one’s party. These unobservables are, of course, difficult to measure and definitely test, but are at least consistent with the overall picture of the committee presented in the rest of the paper, that being a committee held on a tight leash with few individual benefits focused almost entirely on producing the collective ‘party brand’ benefits that the majority party benefits from. The members who would populate a committee like this are likely selected on their being more loyal to their party and receiving the most intrinsic benefit from the collective benefits the committee produces. This theory is not new to the field, however—several studies of special rules have assumed that the preferences of the Rules Committee align with the preferences of majority party leadership, with Marshall going as far as to say that the committee’s actions are best explained by a ‘partisan principal-agent framework’ (Bryan W. Marshall 2002b, Monroe and Robinson 2008).

The committee being stacked with party loyalists is contradictory with informational & partisan theories of committee composition, which posit that committees will be representative of either the floor or the majority party, respectively (Krehbiel 1991, Cox and McCubbins 1993). Distributive theory, which posits that committees will be composed of ‘high-demanders’ who receive the disproportionate share of benefits from the committee, is implicated as well, since it does not appear that members on this committee achieve any disproportionate benefits from committee service (Shepsle and Weingast 1981, Weingast and W. J. Marshall 1988). As for the implications this holds for the floor and policy outcomes in general, the committee being stacked with majority party loyalists gives the majority party control over the special rule process, which is the method through which most major legislation is considered in the House of Representatives. The fact that all other viable routes to the floor require some form of super-majority voting, such as suspension of the rules and unanimous consideration, demonstrates the importance to the majority party of having certainty over the one path that allows major bills to pass with

a simple majority vote. The composition of the Rules Committee upholds the House’s nature as a ‘dictatorship of the majority’.

Discussion

The results of this paper suggest that party leaders may grant some limited amount of influence over which bills receive special rules to members on the Rules Committee, yet the small magnitude of the effect, combined with the near-lack of original jurisdiction legislation considered by the committee and the lack of any other individualized benefits that exceed that of the average committee, suggest that members on the committee don’t get nearly as good of a deal as the exclusivity and importance of the committee may suggest.

This is likely by design; party leaders have to toe a fine line between delegating important tasks to rank-and-file members and ensuring that those members do not use their positions of power to accrue benefits for themselves at the expense of the party cartel. The Rules Committee, with its vitally important role in controlling the legislative agenda, is the one committee that majority party leaders absolutely cannot have rebelling against them— if Rules Committee members decide to stonewall legislation in hopes of extracting rents of some kind, the majority party loses their most important tool for passing legislation without the consent of some amount of minority party members. One only need look at the 118th Congress to observe the dangers of a disloyal Rules Committee— after former Speaker McCarthy was forced to appoint three outsider conservatives to the Rules Committee, including two Freedom Caucus members, in an agreement with far-right members of his conference to support him for Speaker, the committee has dealt more procedural defeats to the majority party than any Rules Committee in recent history, leaving current Speaker Johnson to use suspension of the rules to pass many of his priorities (Watson 2023, Feldman 2024). Since suspension of the rules requires a 2/3rds majority vote for passage of the bill under consideration, Speaker Johnson is now required to solicit Democratic votes for important legislation that would normally route through the Rules Committee and be considered with a special rule, including several stop-gap

funding bills that averted looming government shutdowns. The policy outcomes of the 118th Congress are being substantively shifted because the Speaker cannot rely on the Rules Committee like Speakers have in Congresses past and the rules that do pass have been increasingly voted down by the floor, a stark departure from past Congresses where votes on rules rarely, if ever, faced significant opposition by majority party members.

Although there's no hard statistical evidence on what Rules Committee members are being selected on, the fact that Rules Committee members tend to have higher Party Unity scores prior to joining the committee, as well as the lack of individualized benefits from the committee, is consistent with the notion that the committee is primarily composed of members whom derive the most benefit from being a 'loyal soldier' for their party and thus value the collective party brand benefits that the committee generates. In a way, the lack of individual benefits for members serves to hedge against members joining the committee for reasons that do not align with the collective goals of the party, whom could be potentially dangerous for the functioning of the party cartel. This partially contradicts the predictions of informational and partisan theories of committee organization, which posit that committees will be representative of either the floor or the party respectively (Krehbiel 1991, Cox and McCubbins 1993). The lack of benefits is also inconsistent with the common characterization of the committee as 'prestigious' in both the literature and popular media, insofar as 'prestigious' is used to mean valuable or desirable for individual members of Congress.

This paper is the first to directly test the benefits that the Rules Committee gives to its members and provide an explanation for the decline in the committee's perceived prestige. However, other work has shown that committee assignments have become less valuable in general in recent years, including articles by Berry and Fowler that find that only committee and Appropriations subcommittee chairs receive any significant individualized benefits from their committee positions (Berry and Fowler 2016, Berry and Fowler 2018). If the differences between the power and influence of members of Congress is driven entirely by unobservable factors such as back-door connections or innate ability that may lead members to self-select onto certain committees, rather than the positions on commit-

tees themselves, it implies that the institutions of Congress themselves have deteriorated in their importance and that the distribution of power is much more regulated by informal networks rather than formal institutions (Jenkins and Stewart 2018). Likewise, the significant results for committee chairs in the aforementioned articles may imply that the set of actors that truly have influence in policy produced by the House is a smaller subset than initially envisioned, with committee chairs, ranking minority members, and party leaders having the lion's share of influence. This distribution of power lies somewhere in-between existing theories, with partisan theory asserting that chairs are mere agents of the majority party (Cox and McCubbins 1993, Cox and McCubbins 2005) and distributive theory positing that rank-and-file members on committees receive disproportionate benefits by virtue of their committee service (Weingast and W. J. Marshall 1988). The field would benefit from research that presents a more fleshed out theory of if/why power has centralized in this group of actors and if/how this institutional setup is congruent, if not beneficial, to the interests of rank-and-file members whose power has been ceded to this smaller group of actors.

A Rules Committee Robustness Test

As a robustness test, I estimate the same model in Table 3 with the dependent variable changed to whether a bill was considered under Suspension of the Rules. This data is sourced from the replication data file from Bussing’s article entitled ‘Majority Party Strategy and Suspension of the Rules in the House’ (Bussing 2021). The data only extends to the 113th Congress, hence the smaller number of observations, but I do not expect the change in timespan to significantly bias the results. Suspension of the Rules is how the majority of bills in the House of Representatives are passed, as shown in Figure 2. Under suspension, a bill is allowed 40 minutes of debate, no amendments are allowed, and the bill must pass with a 2/3rds majority vote (Davis 2022). Thus, most bills considered under suspension are bipartisan bills and are often non-controversial in nature, although the majority party often uses these bills to boost the legislative records of their vulnerable members (Bussing 2021). Importantly, unlike special rules, the Rules Committee does not have their hands in the suspension process: the power to bring bills up for suspension lies in the hands of the Speaker. Therefore, I expect to see no significant effect of Majority Party Rules cosponsorship on whether a bill is considered via suspension of the rules. The results are presented below in Table 9:

Table 9: Estimating the effects of Rules Committee cosponsorship on the likelihood of a bill being considered under Suspension of the Rules

	Considered under Suspension of the Rules	
	(1)	(2)
Majority Rules Cosponsorship	−0.013*** (0.004)	0.025** (0.010)
Majority Party Sponsorship	0.053*** (0.004)	0.056*** (0.004)
MajRulesCosp x MajPartySpon		−0.044*** (0.011)
Majority Leader Cosponsorship	0.015 (0.012)	0.018 (0.012)
# of Cosponsors	0.0003*** (0.0001)	0.0003*** (0.0001)
Leadership Bill	−0.087*** (0.027)	−0.085*** (0.027)
Committee Chair Sponsorship	0.107*** (0.008)	0.107*** (0.008)
Observations	47,705	47,705
R ²	0.029	0.029
Topic x Congress F.E.	✓	✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors are clustered by bill sponsor.

The effect of Majority Rules cosponsorship on suspension is actually significantly negative. This provides further credence to the claim that the Rules Committee’s privileged institutional position is what grants the members of the committee the ability to extract latent policy benefits through the special rule procedure. Had the effect of Rules cosponsorship on suspension been significantly positive, it would indicate that something unrelated to the powers of the Rules Committee itself are driving the connection between Rules Committee cosponsorship and special rule consideration, such as back-door political networks or some form of self-selection onto the Rules Committee that correlates with

cosponsorship trends.

B Alternative Specifications for Campaign Finance Tests

Table 10: Effects of Rules Committee Membership on Campaign Donations

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	log(All)	log(PAC)	log(Individual)	log(Party)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Rules	0.115 (0.085)	0.279* (0.157)	0.178* (0.107)	-0.250 (0.462)
Seniority	-0.022 (0.032)	-0.417** (0.167)	-0.064 (0.045)	-0.101 (0.121)
Committee Chair	0.149** (0.064)	0.094 (0.230)	0.179 (0.120)	-0.175 (0.330)
Majority Party	0.071** (0.028)	0.063 (0.071)	0.063 (0.047)	-0.206* (0.118)
Legislative Effectiveness	0.049*** (0.009)	0.105*** (0.034)	0.060*** (0.015)	-0.002 (0.049)
District Uncompetitiveness	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.012 (0.008)	-0.016*** (0.006)	0.016 (0.013)
Observations	5,367	5,367	5,367	5,367
R ²	0.022	0.011	0.012	0.002
Member and Time F.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓
District x Redistricting Cycle F.E.				
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors are clustered by member.

Table 11: Effects of Rules Committee Membership on Campaign Donations

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	log(All)	log(PAC)	log(Individual)	log(Party)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Rules	0.106 (0.085)	0.171 (0.138)	0.174 (0.106)	-0.281 (0.463)
Seniority	0.050*** (0.006)	-0.007 (0.015)	-0.007 (0.010)	-0.452*** (0.026)
Committee Chair	0.145** (0.064)	0.141 (0.238)	0.171 (0.121)	-0.161 (0.329)
Majority Party	0.076*** (0.028)	0.125* (0.074)	0.066 (0.047)	-0.123 (0.118)
Legislative Effectiveness	0.050*** (0.009)	0.084** (0.033)	0.062*** (0.015)	-0.018 (0.049)
District Uncompetitiveness	-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.017*** (0.006)	0.010 (0.013)
Observations	5,367	5,367	5,367	5,367
R ²	0.056	0.005	0.012	0.139
Member and Time F.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓
District x Redistricting Cycle F.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Robust S.E.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Standard errors are clustered by member.

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