

The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle Resurgent: Committee Assignment Reform in the House of Representatives

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Abstract

The committee on which a member sits influences every aspect of their political life. In 1994, the Republican leadership reorganized their process for assigning members in a way that gave their leadership considerably greater influence, while over the past 25 years Democrats have gradually changed their procedure with the same goals. I examine the history of these changes and analyze the degree to which this has altered the criteria on which members are assigned to committees. While journalistic accounts show that leaders have emphasized loyalty as the main important criteria, I show that party leaders are still focused on accommodating most members most of the time.

Following the 2018 election, Kathleen Rice (D-NY) tried to gain a seat on the Judiciary Committee. A former prosecutor and third-term member, the New York delegation promoted her as a natural choice for the spot. However, she was a vocal critic of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, voting against Pelosi's bid to return as speaker in the new Democratic majority. In what was widely reported as "Pelosi's Revenge," the speaker left Rice's name off the list of preferred candidates she submitted to the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which assigns members to committees, despite the fact that Rice had around the average level of party support in her voting record. The steering committee was chaired by the speaker and filled with leader appointees, and so Pelosi's lobbying was enough to swing the vote and keep Rice off of the Judiciary Committee. This was the second such disappointment for New York that Congress, as Anthony Brindisi, a freshman who also voted against Pelosi, was left off Armed Services. Pelosi was able to punish this disloyalty because of the voting power that

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the leadership commands on the party's steering committee, which determines committee assignments. In the opening of that same Congress, Pelosi dealt with another potentially uncooperative group, the Congressional Progressive Caucus. This growing group of Democrats argued that they energized the electorate to deliver the party's majority. Pelosi, both sensitive to the need for harmony among the wings of the Democratic Party and recognizing their value to the Democratic majority, promised to increase the group's representation on the most influential committees. This negotiation is one that House leaders face every two years and represents what scholars have called the "giant jigsaw puzzle." How do leaders balance a party's myriad goals when making committee assignments?

The question of what members get on which committees has been a subject of exploration for congressional scholars for decades. Early studies found the process to be largely one of accommodation and self selection, where members picked the assignments that suited them and leaders did their best to ensure most members were satisfied, while more recent studies have emphasized the effect of different types of party loyalty. While these studies well characterized committee assignment politics, they now largely describe a process that no longer exists. In 1994, after winning the first Republican majority in forty years, the Conference gave incoming speaker Newt Gingrich significant freedom to rewrite the party's rules. One major change was transforming the party's Committee on Committees into the House Republican Steering Committee, which controlled committee assignments. The party leadership, which accounted for about ten percent of votes in the Committee on Committees, now commanded around half of the votes and has ever since. This change was undertaken with the explicit goal of rewarding supporters and threatening defectors and subsequent leaders, on both sides of the aisle, have now made personal and political loyalty a central aspect of the committee assignment process.

While the reforms increased the power of the party leadership in making assignments, party leaders do not single-mindedly aim to reward loyalty and spur compliance. They also want to assist in their members' reelection chances and form a cooperative governing ma-

jority, and those goals sometimes mean elevating members who are not as loyal. Leaders may want to accommodate members in order to ensure that as much of the party as possible is being well served by committee assignments. Under an accommodation framework, the limiting factor in guaranteeing members get the assignment they want is space. The number of available committee seats is bounded, with the minority party having limited say in how many committee seats they get, and different committees have greater numbers of requesters. Accommodating leaders will attempt to support many members in getting their preferred assignments, rather than selectively trying to support party loyalists.

I examine whether the change in the parties' steering committees has changed the criteria on which members get assigned to committees. In particular, I evaluate whether leaders are using committee assignments as tools of loyalty or opportunities for accommodation. I show through journalistic accounts that recent leaders have insisted on loyalty, but have defined loyalty in different ways, which are often particularistic and idiosyncratic. To examine long-run changes in the committee assignment process that spans multiple leaders, I use multiple definitions of loyalty to test whether more loyal members are given their preferred committee assignments. In my quantitative analysis, though, I do not find consistent evidence, under any definition, that loyalty became a stronger determinant of committee assignments after Steering Committee reform. Instead characteristics of the requested committee, such as the amount of available seats or number of competing copartisans vying for spots, predict success in gaining a favored committee assignment. These factors are consistent with an accommodation model, where party leaders try to satisfy as many member's requests as possible.

Committee Assignment Politics

At the beginning of every Congress, many members choose to seek new committee assignments. They put much effort into gaining their preferred assignment, with some preparing

elaborate presentations to their party’s steering committee about how they will serve on the committee. Committee assignments have even helped motivate members to switch parties. Greg Laughlin crossed over to the Republican majority in 1995 for the promise of a seat on Ways and Means, and Phil Gramm’s removal from the Budget committee was a key factor in his decision to abandon the Democrats in the early 1980s. The choice of committee assignment, thus, is not taken lightly. It influences the legislative priorities members pursue and how successful they are. About 40% of the legislation that members introduce is referred to a committee on which they sit (Congressional Bills Project). Moreover, if legislation is referred to a committee on which a member sits, it is much more likely to be successful. Since 1981, bills referred to a member’s committee pass the House 21.4% of the time, and only 9.7% of the time when referred to a committee on which the member does not sit.¹ A member’s choice to seek an assignment, and the subsequent committee on which they are placed, can have significant consequences for a member’s personal career as well as their capacity for district representation. Then-Representative Chuck Schumer once said of the choice of what committee assignment to pursue, “It’s the most important decision you can make. If you’re on a good committee, you’ll enjoy legislating and accomplish something. If you’re on a bad committee, you won’t enjoy it here” (Fuerbringer 1986).

At the same time, party leaders are concerned with what members attain coveted committee slots. They have to balance multiple, often competing, priorities when determining who to recommend for what assignment. They want to reward allies and punish defectors, like Pelosi did with Kathleen Rice, but loyalty is just one consideration. Party leaders also want to keep harmony among divisions in their caucus, to attain or keep majority party status, and help each member’s reelection chances. They must solve what Kenneth Shepsle called “the giant jigsaw puzzle (1979).” They attempt to optimize the committee assignments that will best serve party goals, while operating under constraints like committee size and the popularity of different committee seats.

¹When minor bills are excluded from the calculation, bills referred to a members committee pass 16.3% of the time and 4.9% otherwise (Congressional Bills Project).

The choice of what committees to request and which members are successful has received considerable scholarly attention. The pioneering work of Masters (1971) identified two important facets of committee assignment politics. First, researchers must be sensitive to the difference in party organization in how committee assignments are made. Second, he identified that party leaders use committee assignments strategically in order to reward loyalty and placate potential threats. While studies have consistently found evidence of some leadership influence, early studies of committee assignments saw the process as one of self-selection. With the exception of exclusive power committees, members requested assignments that were important to their constituency and party leaders did their best to accommodate those requests (Cook 1983; Davidson and Oleszek 1990; Gertzog 1976). Party harmony was prized and the most biggest factors influencing assignment were the amount of competition for the spot, electoral needs of members, and regional balance (Deering and Smith 1997; Smith and Ray 1983). Leaders were intentional and strategic about these goals, preferring to increase the size of committees in order to allow more members their requested slots (Ray and Smith 1984; Westefeld 1974). That latter point suggests that leaders are willing to give away a currency that could be used as a reward for loyalty or building a policy majority in favor of keeping the size of their majority.

In the 1980s, a series of more aggressive speakers led scholars to reevaluate the role of the party leadership. Party loyalty emerged as an expected criteria for committee assignments, and leaders routinely calculated loyalty scores when determining assignments (Frisch and Kelly 2006; Rohde 1991; Smith and Ray 1983). Recent studies of assignment politics have consistently supported the idea that modern party leaders use committee assignments as rewards, using multiple different definitions of loyalty. Leadership support scores constructed from leadership speeches (Asmussen and Ramey 2018) and leaders' personal papers (Meinke 2022) find that better assignments go to members that help the leadership. The ability to raise funds for the party also increases a member's chance of landing a prized spot (Adler and Cayton 2022; Jenkins n.d.; Peterson 2015). The shift from party harmony to party loyalty is

indicative of how the committee assignment process is not stagnant. Indeed, the process is occasionally upended completely and the mechanism by which representatives are placed on committees is restructured. One such instance, 1995 Republican rule changes that created the House Republican Steering Committee, is the motivation for this study.

Two major studies have tackled the question of whether steering committee reform influenced what members received preferred committee assignments. These analyses look at 1975 rule changes for the Democrats which took control away from the Democratic contingent on the Committee on Ways and Means and empowered the party leadership in a Steering and Policy Committee. Smith and Ray note the continuity of processes throughout both systems of committee assignment, both in terms of how members request assignments and how the selecting committee makes assignments (1983). Cox and McCubbins likewise find that the rule change did not consistently moderate the effect of loyalty on assignments (2007). These findings suggest that the Ways and Means committee had similar goals and considerations to the Steering Committee in making committee assignments. The creation of the House Republican Steering Committee, in an era where party leadership was growing stronger, presents a new arena to examine how selection committee process change can influence assignment outcomes.

While the literature on committee assignments is voluminous, it does not address the effect of recent changes in the makeup of the steering committees, and thus does not adequately describe the committee assignment process in the modern House. The majority of studies predate Gingrich's reforms, and so naturally cannot comment on their effect, but even contemporary studies do not grapple with them. Research that covers Congresses before and after the Republican Revolution treat both eras equivalently despite the fact that the data generating process is different. In this essay, I redirect the focus onto the rules governing modern committee assignments as a potential factor in how party leaders are able to exercise control over assignments.

Committee Assignment Process Reforms

Each party has a different process by which they assign members to committees, and both parties have seen that method change in the past few decades. In this section, I explicate major rule and procedural changes since the 1990s, as well as the consequences of those reforms as stated by party leaders in journalistic accounts.

Republican Steering Committee

For House Republicans, committee assignments had been made by the Committee on Committees since the early twentieth century. The Committee on Committees was regionally representative. Originally, the committee was made up of one member from each state who had voting power equivalent to the number of Republican members in that state's delegation. In the 1970s and 1980s, leadership influence was moribund. Leaders Gerald Ford and John Rhodes deferred to the Committee on Committees and often stressed the constraint that came from the Democratic leadership controlling the number of available seats when members asked for particular slots (Frisch and Kelly 2006). In the 101st Congress, the Committee on Committees was reformed to include greater leadership influence, giving the Republican leader twelve votes and the whip six. The voting structure was such that this amounted to fewer than ten percent of the committee's 197 votes, with regional representation remaining the dominant force, and party leaders having only moderate success in getting their preferred candidates onto favored committee (Frisch and Kelly 2006).

In 1994, unexpected electoral success delivered the Republicans their first majority in forty years, and the architect of that victory, Newt Gingrich, was given wide latitude to restructure the Republican Conference's rules. Aides drafted a memo for Gingrich shortly after the election which read "The current Republican structure [for making committee assignments] is dominated by regional influences and intricate personal relationships. The

leadership has little voting influence even if their voting bloc is enlarged substantially” (Novak 1994). Thus, Gingrich did not simply give the party leadership more votes on the Committee on Committees, he abolished it altogether. In its place, he created a new Republican Steering Committee, which the speaker chaired. It had a considerably different voting structure than the old committee.² Regional representatives were relegated from being the overwhelmingly dominant voice to a minority. The chief beneficiary was the speaker, who got five votes on the new panel, the Majority Leader, who got two, and other members of the leadership who earned representation for the first time. In the new system, the leadership accounted for about half the votes on the committee. Compounding this increase was a change in how committee chairs were selected. Seniority was dropped in favor of ideological congruence with party leadership and willingness to aggressively pursue party policy (Cann 2008; Deering and Wahlbeck 2006). This led committee chairs to act more consistently as agents of the party leadership. Thus, the spots on the Steering Committee held by committee chairs are indirect projections of leadership influence.

An immediate consequence of this altered assignment arrangement were the number of junior members that received spots on favored committees. Freshman were key to Gingrich’s new majority. Ideologically conservative, they ran on Gingrich’s Contract with America election platform and thus were considered both loyal to the new speaker and motivated to enact his agenda. In return for their anticipated loyalty, they received key committee assignments over more senior members. For the first time in decades, one freshman was put on the powerful Rules Committee, to which the speaker has unilateral power to appoint members

²The precise membership of the Republican Steering Committee has varied since 1994, but the trend toward party leadership has remained. In the 105th Congress, the committee was made up of the speaker, Republican leader, whip, conference chair, National Republican Campaign Committee chair, chairs of the Appropriations, Budget, Rules, and Ways and Means Committees, ten regional representatives, and representatives of the freshman and sophomore classes. The leadership accounted for 14 of 26 votes. In advance of the 115th Congress, the committee underwent additional changes that increased the number of regional representatives to 17 and reduced the party leader to four votes instead of five. This adjustment left the leadership with 14 of 35 votes, which still far outpaced the control it had prior to Gingrich era reforms. In the 117th Congress, the Steering Committee included the Republican Leader, whip, deputy whip, conference chair, policy committee chair, conference vice-chair, conference secretary, NRCC chair, former NRCC chair, 17 regional representatives, representatives of the freshman and sophomore classes, the Dean of the House, a leadership appointee, and a rotating committee chairman.

(Ornstein 1995). Of the eleven new members Republicans appointed to the Appropriations Committee, seven were freshmen, and over the objections of committee chair Bill Archer, who favored a smaller committee, Gingrich expanded the Ways and Means Committee as a way to include three seats for first-term members (Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Owens 1997; Rae 1998). Gingrich also, though demanded political loyalty as a criteria to advance in the House. Republican members on the Appropriations Committee were required to sign a letter indicating their fidelity to Republican plans to slash taxes (Aldrich, Perry, and Rohde 2013). He noted that any member unwilling to support party priorities was replaceable.

Following Gingrich's heavy-handed rule, subsequent Republican leaders pledged to have a more open, representative process for committee assignments. These promises were left unfulfilled, as those leaders too found the judicious awarding of committee assignments a useful tool. Robert Livingston, who chaired the Republican Steering Committee prior to the 106th Congress, categorically rejected making assignments that put individual member interest before the party.³ In a letter Livingston sent when challenging Gingrich for the speakership, he wrote "Members should not be assigned to Committees because of their districts. Fragile members are afraid to cast tough votes, and that inhibits the passage of credible legislation" (Eiperlin 1998). Livingston rewarded top fundraisers with plum assignments to top committees, while the freshman class - considerably smaller and less fundamental to the Republican base than the group that swept Gingrich into power - were less successful in seeking assignments.

Though Livingston was soon eclipsed by his personal indiscretions, successive Republican leaders did not fundamentally differ from their predecessors in their approach to committee assignments. In the 107th Congress, Hastert announced to his Conference that fundraising on behalf of the party would be considered favorably when determining assignments (Herberlig and Larson 2013). Hastert used assignments as a stick as well as a carrot, denying requested

³Livingston was expected to become speaker following Gingrich's 1998 resignation before his own scandals led Livingston to resign prior to taking up the position. However, as the expected leader, Livingston chaired the Steering Committee when it made assignments for the 106th Congress and as such exercised his influence as a party leader.

assignments to moderate members who had signed a discharge petition on a campaign finance reform bill that the party disliked. GOP Conference Chairwoman Deborah Pryce noted that “procedural betrayals” were being considered when giving committee assignments (Meinke 2015). The pattern continued with John Boehner, in addition to exercising discretion over which members received their preferred assignments, actively booted disloyal members from committees, violating the “property rights” norm that anticipates that representatives maintain their committee spots when available. Rebellious right-wing Boehner critic Tim Huelskamp lost his seats on Budget and Agriculture, David Schweikert was removed from Financial Services, and Justin Amash was taken off of Budget (Toeplitz and Lorber 2012). Boehner’s demand for loyalty was indifferent to ideology, with the moderate Walter B. Jones being stripped of his assignment on Financial Services after voting against the party’s budget in the previous Congress.⁴ Boehner and other Steering Committee members maintained that it was not a scorecard of voting records or any other single factor, but rather their unwillingness to work with the party leadership. Lynn Westmoreland, who was the Steering Committee’s regional representative for southern states, cited the “a-hole factor” as key to their removal (Newhauser and Strong 2012). Boehner returned to this retributive tactic in 2015, declining to reappoint Richard Nugent and Daniel Webster to the Rules Committee after they voted against him for the speakership (Marcos 2015). Speaker Paul Ryan in the following Congress dropped all pretense, delaying committee assignments until after the speakership floor vote (Wong 2016). The transition to a leadership-dominated Republican Steering Committee has empowered leaders to strategically award committee assignments to allies and punish personal and political disloyalty. This is a significant departure from previous Republican leaders, and has persisted for more than two decades afterwards.

⁴One journalistic account suggested that Jones was removed to give cover to Boehner’s goal to remove the conservative firebrands (Allen 2012). Whether it was for particular disloyalty or political cover, the removal demonstrates the amount of influence the speaker wielded in using committee assignments to further his goals.

Democratic Steering and Policy Committee

In 1975, Democratic reformers wrested control from the Democratic contingent of the Ways and Means Committee, which had decided committee assignments since 1911 (Aldrich, Perry, and Rohde 2010). The Caucus gave that role to a new Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which junior Democrats hoped would improve their chances of acquiring preferred assignments by empowering the party leadership. The new committee was made up of the speaker, Democratic Leader, whip, Caucus Chair, twelve regionally appointed members, and eight members appointed by the speaker. However, both before and after the speaker gained a formal role in the process, it was the habits of the individual leaders that determined their influence over committee assignments. Sam Rayburn, in the pre-reform era, stacked Ways and Means with loyalists who conferred with him when making assignments (Manley 1970; Shepsle 1978). John McCormack and Carl Albert, conversely, faced a rank-and-file that was newly empowered and did not exercise as much influence over assignments (Shepsle 1978; Frisch and Kelly 2006). Speakers Tip O'Neill and Jim Wright, particularly the latter, reinvigorated the party leadership's role in the process, calculating party loyalty scores (Smith and Deering 1997; Smith and Ray 1983). Wright in particular was noted for the control he exerted as speaker, aiming to get both fellow Texans and partisans on favored committees (Frisch and Kelly 2006). Wright's influence was not lasting, as successors Foley and Gephardt did not aggressively pursue party loyalty through committee assignments (Patterson 2015). Pelosi, who has led the Democratic Caucus for nearly twenty years, received notice immediately for her willingness to reward allies and punish enemies through committee assignments. In her first few years as leader, she placed close associates on the Steering and Policy Committee, while high donors to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Rahm Emanuel, John Larson, and Mike Thompson received coveted seats on Ways and Means (Billings 2005). She has continued this trend throughout her career, selecting loyal members for preferred and prestigious committees (Patterson 2015). Because of her longevity, it is impossible to determine whether this practice is the new operating procedure

of the Democratic Party or an idiosyncrasy of Pelosi herself.

The main evolution in the DSPC since its 1975 formation has been its growth, and particularly the expansion of deputy whip involvement and the number of leadership appointees.⁵ In the early 1980s, the committee consisted of four members of the Democratic leadership, eight speaker appointees, and twelve regional representatives. By 2000, leadership representation had ballooned to 9 members of the leadership, three deputy whips, and sixteen leader appointees, while the number of regional representatives remained static (Meinke 2015). The committee has continued to grow and in the 117th Congress, members of the leadership, their appointees, and the whip organization made up 38 of the now 63 member committee. While the individual discretion of different leaders has determined how active they are in pursuing party goals through committee assignments, the formal voting bloc of the leadership has monotonically increased. Though Democrats only changed their process gradually, they came to resemble Republicans. Through those changes, Democrats have given the leadership the opportunity to exercise more control over assignments.

Loyalty and Accommodation in Committee Assignments

There are more members who want major committee seats than there are seats on those committees. Thus, the discretion of the selector is paramount in determining what members receive their preferred spots. A change in the selector provides an opportunity for a change in outcomes. While the locus of voting power was vastly different in the Republican Steering

⁵Like its Republican counterpart, the composition of the DSPC changes slightly from Congress to Congress. In the 117th Congress, the committee consisted of the speaker, three co-chairs of the committee nominated by the speaker, the Democratic leader, whip, assistant speaker, caucus chair, caucus vice chair, chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, four co-chairs of the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, caucus leadership representative, freshman leadership representative, chair of the Committee on Caucus Procedures, parliamentarian, two senior chief deputy whips, eight chief deputy whips, a freshman class representative, twelve regional representatives, chairs of the Appropriations, Budget, Rules, Energy and Commerce, Financial Services, and Ways and Means committees, as well as up to 15 members appointed by the Speaker (CRS Report R46786). Thus, the speaker and her appointees alone make up 19 out of 63 votes. When the rest of the leadership organization is included, they make up a majority of the committee.

Committee than in their Committee on Committees, it does not necessarily follow that their criteria for granting plum assignments differ. Under both systems, there is still an interest in protecting electorally vulnerable members, ensuring regional representation, and promoting a cohesive governing coalition. Indeed, the continuity in these considerations is likely why there was little discernible change in the determinants of committee request success for Democrats after the 1975 reform. Here, I assess two explanations for request success. The first, loyalty, suggests that the reformed steering committees empowered leaders to more forthrightly dole out committee assignments as reward for party cooperation. The second, accommodation, posits that party leaders, even with increased independent power, want to grant as many requests as possible, most of the time.

Party leaders want to develop policy majorities and so need members who will reliably support the party's priorities. Committee assignments can serve as selective benefits that help leaders create those majorities. In 1994, the party leaders were given more control over the assignment process and so could more freely distribute these benefits. These reforms came from the Republican leadership, with the precise intention of increasing their control over multiple aspects of the policymaking process. Beyond that, the party leadership made explicit their expectation for loyalty as a criteria for committee success. As described in the previous section, journalistic accounts make clear that House Republican leaders since 1994 have not been shy about using committee seats as a way to command political and personal loyalty and punish dissent. House Democrats, of course, did not undergo the same reforms as Republicans, increasing the leadership voting contingent on the Steering and Policy Committee only gradually. However, accounts of leadership involvement in committee assignment decisions, especially after Pelosi became the Democratic leader, demonstrated a strategy that mirrors Republicans.

If party leaders were to only serve the most loyal members, they would likely find their caucus small and unhappy. Instead, leaders understand that they must balance building a loyal policy majority with developing an electoral majority. As the 1994 reforms went

into place, the House went from a long period of single-party rule to a time of insecure majorities, where the relative sizes of each party's contingent were closer and majority status was regularly in contest. As majority control depends on winning seats where both parties are competitive, members representing those districts often need to position themselves as moderates. Thus, while the party leadership expects, and wants to reward, loyalty from the average member of their party, their goal of gaining and retaining majority status requires helping members get on committees useful for bolstering their reelection chances, even while those members must break from the party. For example, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania represents a moderate Philadelphia suburban district that, prior to his 2018 election, had selected a Democratic congressman for the previous seventy years. He is currently the most moderate Republican in the House, with a party loyalty score of 69%, well short of the Republican median, which hovers around 90%. In spite of this, he was first chosen to the coveted Transportation committee, well known for its capacity to direct funds to one's district, and then to the powerful Ways and Means committee. When any seat has the potential to flip control of the chamber, the party leadership wants to accommodate as many members as it can.

Some initial evidence for accommodation lies in trends in committee size. Party leaders often manipulate the size of committee to further their party's interest, but that occur in multiple ways (Brady and Lee 2016; Ray and Smith 1984). If leaders want to award committee assignments as a prize for loyalty, then smaller committees makes each seat more valuable. If, instead, they want to accommodate more members, increased committee sizes are preferred. Figure 1 shows the number of total committee seats in each Congress. It seems that new Republican majorities cut the number of committee seats in the 104th and then 112th Congresses. However, as the Republicans retained their majority, committee seats were consistently added.⁶ By the mid-2000s, the number of seats was higher than

⁶While it is interesting that the Republican leadership in the most recent Republican controlled Congresses have remained small, perhaps indicating a greater interest in loyalty, that is outside the scope of the present study.

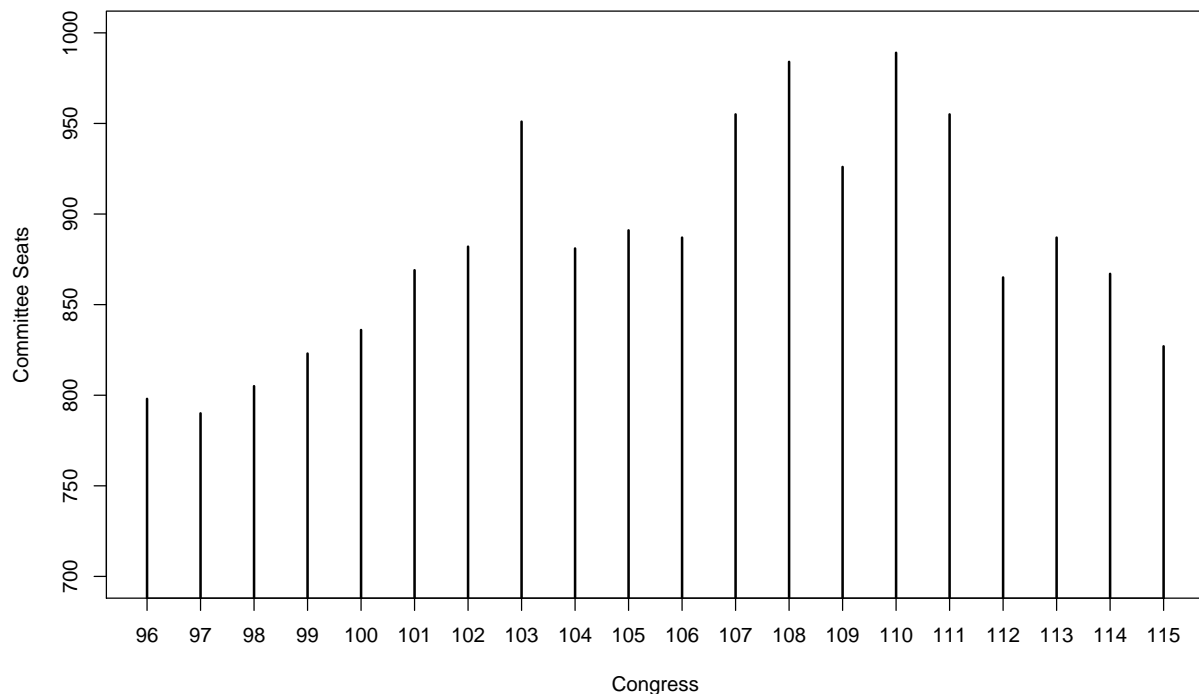


Figure 1: Total committee seats by Congress

before the Gingrich takeover. A higher availability of seats makes it more difficult to use the distribution of those seats as selective benefits, but does fit with a model where party leaders are trying to get as many of their members on favored committees as possible.⁷

While a loyalty model of committee assignment politics prioritizes individual characteristics, accommodation focuses on characteristics of the committees being requested, focused around the constraints faced by leaders. If only one member makes a request for an open seat on a committee, an accommodating party leadership would grant that request, regardless of that member's level of loyalty. These two countervailing forces, loyalty and accommodation

⁷The amount of committee seats is somewhat complicated by each party's rule about the number of committees on which a member can sit. Both parties have designated the Rules Committee, Ways and Means, Appropriations, Energy and Commerce, and Financial Services as exclusive committees, which means that a member can have no other committee assignments while serving on one of those committees. For Democrats, Energy and Commerce is only an exclusive committee to members elected in the 104th Congress and after and Financial Services is only an exclusive committee to members elected in the 109th Congress and after. Despite committee exclusivity, both parties consider service on the Ethics Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence to be exempt, so members can serve on one of those committees and an exclusive committee simultaneously.

set up two hypothesis:

Loyalty Hypothesis: After the 1994 rule changes, party loyalty will have an increased effect on being granted a requested committee assignment

Accommodation Hypothesis: Committee assignments will be determined predominantly by committee-level characteristics

Committee Requests and Size in the Party Era

To examine the changing criteria on which members are assigned to committees, I exploit committee assignment request data. Committee requests are the official medium by which members express their preferences to be on committees and are gathered from leaders' archival data (Frisch and Kelly 2006). While some studies assume that all committee aspirants want to be on influence committees, fewer than half of requesters list one of those committees as their first choice. Because these are party documents and not public documents, the data is limited by what previous leaders and Steering Committee members have made available in their papers. I use data from the 97th to 108th Congresses (1985-2005). This includes multiple years before and after the 1994 Republican reforms, and spans multiple leaders for both parties, as well as majority and minority status for both parties. In Table 1, I present which members are requesting new committee assignments, broken down by party and seniority. In each era, about a third of members send request letters. With the exception of freshmen Republicans, though, fewer members are making formal requests for new committee assignments. This might be due to members may be making their desires known in informal ways, such as personally lobbying individual steering committee members. What this data certainly shows is that members are less likely to request committees the more senior they are, and most committee requests happen within a member's first two terms.

Table 1: Proportion of members that made a request for a committee assignment, separated by era, party, and seniority. The unit of analysis is member-Congress.

	97 th-103rd Congresses	104th-108th Congresses
	Request Letter Sent	Request Letter Sent
All Members	31.5%	29.3%
All Democrats	25.8%	20.9%
All Republicans	40.1%	37.2%
All Freshmen	80.2%	71.1%
Freshmen Democrats	82.0%	50.0%
Freshmen Republicans	78.1%	85.5%
2nd Term Members	57.3%	52.4%
2nd Term Democrats	44.5%	37.2%
2nd Term Republicans	73.4%	64.4%
Long Term Members	17.4%	15.0%
Long Term Democrats	13.0%	12.6%
Long Term Republicans	24.6%	17.5%

Table 2 shows the success of members at gaining a requested committee assignment, again disaggregated by party and seniority. Perhaps surprisingly, members are more likely to get desired assignments in the Party Era than before. This result is due in part to changes in committee size. While Gingrich eliminated three committees, and shrunk many other committees, their membership expanded over the next several Congresses, such that by 2001, there were more committee slots than there were directly before the Republican Revolution. The biggest beneficiary during the party era appear to be first-term members, of which nearly three-quarters of requesters got a preferred committee assignment. This finding is in part due to the fact that first-term members submit more requests than members at any other level of seniority, however they are also extremely successful at getting their first choice committee assignment. The Democrats, notably, show a similar pattern to their Republican counterparts in terms of rewarding the most junior members.

Table 2: Proportion of members that received their requested committee assignment by era, party, and seniority.

	97th-103rd Congresses		104th-108th Congresses	
	Request Granted	1st Choice Request Granted	Request Granted	1st Choice Request Granted
All Democrats	46.0%	32.9%	51.6%	36.5%
All Republicans	41.9%	25.0%	55.9%	41.0%
Freshmen Democrats	53.7%	23.9%	72.1%	44.1%
Freshmen Republicans	63.1%	28.6%	76.0%	47.4%
2nd Term Democrats	31.5%	30.3%	38.1%	27.2%
2nd Term Republicans	30.2%	18.1%	48.8%	39.7%
Senior Democrats	44.8%	44.2%	44.8%	36.5%
Senior Republicans	56.9%	26.0%	39.7%	34.1%

Table 3: Proportion of requests and first choice requests for committees separated by era.

	97th-103rd Congresses		104th-108th Congresses	
	Proportion of Requests	Proportion of First Choice Requests	Proportion of Requests	Proportion of First Choice Requests
Influence Committees				
Appropriations	10.0%	17.0%	13.6%	22.7%
Budget	9.2%	12.9%	4.6%	2.5%
Rules	2.4%	3.6%	1.6%	1.8%
Ways and Means	8.5%	14.9%	9.8%	16.8%
Policy Committees				
Banking	6.2%	4.6%	8.6%	6.2%
Education and Labor	2.1%	1.5%	3.5%	1.3%
Energy and Commerce	11.8%	14.9%	11.9%	17.5%
Foreign Affairs	4.9%	4.4%	5.6%	2.9%
Government Operations	4.2%	0.7%	2.0%	0.8%
Judiciary	1.5%	0.7%	3.9%	3.2%
Constituency Committees				
Agriculture	4.2%	5.5%	3.8%	2.4%
Armed Services	7.1%	8.1%	7.3%	6.4%
Interior	4.3%	2.8%	4.6%	4.4%
Merchant Marines and Fisheries	2.2%	0.7%		Abolished
Public Works	6.0%	3.6%	12.0%	9.9%
Science	5.9%	1.7%	2.0%	0.8%
Small Business	4.8%	0.5%	1.9%	0.0%
Veterans' Affairs	2.6%	0.3%	1.6%	0.2%
Service Committees				
District of Columbia	0.1%	0%		Abolished
Ethics	0.08%	0%	0.1%	0.2%
House Administration	1.1%	1.0%	0.4%	0.2%
Post Office	0.7%	0.2%		Abolished

In Table 3, I turn to differences in what committees are requested. Following Smith and Deering, I organize the committees into influence committees, policy committees, constituency committees, and service committees. Influence committees are, in general, the most requested committees, with the exception of the Rules Committee. As it is the speaker's prerogative to appoint members of the Rules Committee, members might be less likely to "waste" a request on a committee for which they are unlikely to be chosen. While there is some change in degree, there is much continuity across eras in terms of what committees are requested. The three most requested committees in both eras are the money committees, Appropriations and Ways and Means, as well as Energy and Commerce, which is the largest committee with the most jurisdiction. For constituency-oriented committees, the big change of the party era is the increase in Public Works as an attractive committee, garnering around as many requests as Energy and Commerce, though it is less frequently listed as a first choice request. Finally, the service committees remain rarely requested. Two such committees, Post Office and District of Columbia, were disbanded altogether during the Gingrich reforms, but made up fewer than one percent of requests beforehand.

The committees that members request is only half the story. The requests are necessitated by a limited number of available committee seats. Above, I show that the number of committee seats initially fell when the Republicans took control, but then soon surpassed the number of seats in the previous era. In Figure 2, I show the number of seats on the four most requested committees, Appropriations, Energy and Commerce, Ways and Means, and Public Works, over time and changing party control. In Figure 3, I show the number of majority party seats on those committees. As the majority has the leverage when negotiating committee size, this is a clearer indication of how party leaders try to manipulate committee size to suit their interests. Both charts show that, despite a slight reduction in the number of seats in the 104th Congress, the most requested committees grew throughout the era after the steering committee reforms.⁸ This data is more consistent with an accommodation model than a loyalty model, as expanding committees allows a wider variety of members to occupy those seats, while a loyalty minded party leader might create scarcity among favored seats in order to create a selective incentive.

Research Design and Methods

Having explored the data, I now move to testing the expectation that the effect of loyalty in the party era. Not every member makes committee assignment requests, and not every member makes one every Congress. Since members do not randomly select into this group, looking just at what members are successful in their assignments would result in biased estimates. I use a Heckman selection model to explicitly model the decision to make a request.⁹ The outcome of the first stage equation is whether or not a member requests a committee assignment, while the second stage is whether the request is successful. Because the data

⁸The Republican takeover in the 112th Congress brought a reduction in the size of committees. A new majority party is one of the few times that the party leadership can reduce the size of committees without jeopardizing the slots of their own members, as the previously minority party has fewer members actively holding those spots. It is notable that, after the initial reduction, the number of seats is largely stable.

⁹There is some controversy over whether the Heckman model is an appropriate strategy for selection problems. I detail those concerns and offer alternative models in the appendix.

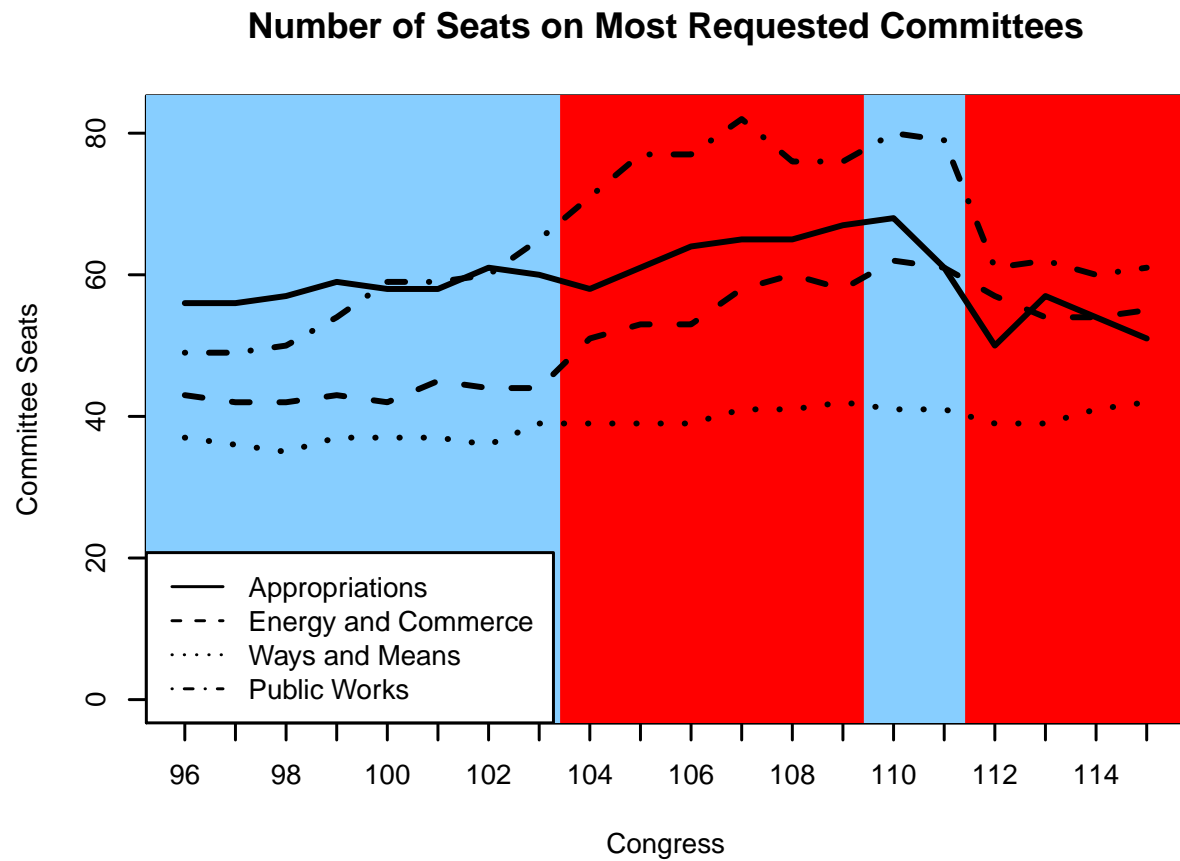


Figure 2: The number of seats on the four most requested committees. The blue background indicates Democratic majority control, while the red background indicates Republican majority control.

Number of Majority Party Seats on Most Requested Committees

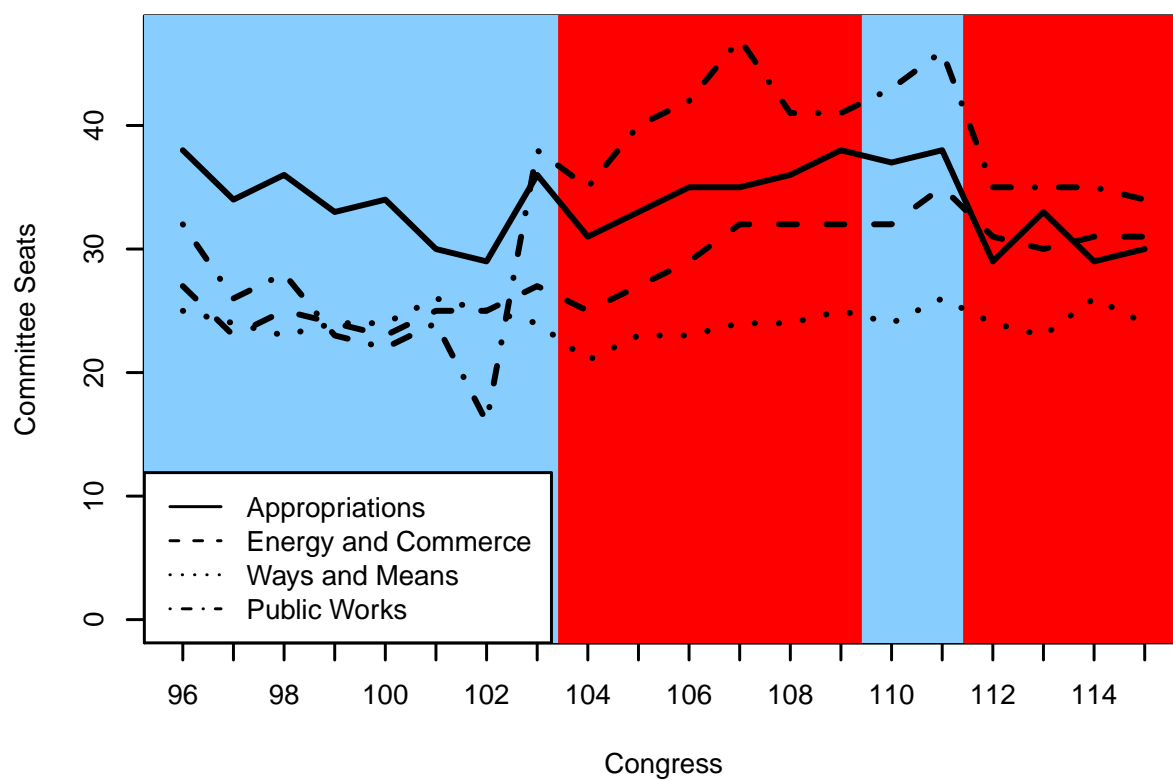


Figure 3: The number of majority party seats on the four most requested committees. The blue background indicates Democratic majority control, while the red background indicates Republican majority control.

generating process for committee assignments differs by party, I model the two parties separately. In both stages, I control for a number of characteristics that may affect a member’s likelihood of being assigned to their preferred committee. I use vote percentage in a member’s most recent election as an indicator of electoral marginality. I include the number of seats that the party has gained or lost in a given Congress as an estimate of the supply of committee seats. I also control for seniority and whether a requester is a member of the party leadership, as well as the loyalty variables that make up the main analysis for the second stage equation.

The historical record makes clear that different leaders have defined loyalty differently, and often in idiosyncratic ways that would elude easy quantitative analysis. For example, Boehner and Pelosi’s personal loyalty that punishes those who did not support their speakership differs from Hastert’s focus on fundraising or Gingrich’s expectation of loyalty on the floor. While party dues and fundraising assistance are seen as near necessities for gaining plum assignments in the modern era, most members did not donate to their party’s campaign committees at all until the late 1990s. This poses a challenge to scholars trying to examine long-term changes in the dynamics of House committee assignment politics. Many have devised innovative methods to capture how leaders define loyalty (see, for example, Amussen and Ramey 2018; Jenkins n.d.; Meinke 2022). All those methods, though, do not account for the fact that different leaders potentially orthogonal definitions of what loyalty and disloyalty are. I attempt to account for this by defining loyalty in three different ways.

In the second stage of the selection model, my variables of interest are the interaction between my three loyalty measures and an indicator variable for after the 1994 committee reforms. The first loyalty variable, ideological distance, is the absolute distance between a member’s first dimension DW-Nominate score and the party median. Second is party unity, the frequency with which a member voted with the majority of their party against the majority of the opposite party in the Congress directly preceding the decision to make a request. As this is undefined for members who did not serve in the previous Congress, freshman are

excluded from this model. Finally, the third loyalty variable is the logged amount a member donated to their party's congressional campaign committee in the cycle preceding their request. As the loyalty variables are likely highly correlated, as they all represent attempts to capture the same concept, I run each of them in a separate model.

Additionally, I include variables in the second stage that are characteristics of the committee being requested. These variables represent the accommodation framework and focuses on the constraints that party leaders face when determining assignments. First, I look at committee size. I expect that requests for seats on larger committees are more likely to be granted because there is a greater supply of those slots. Similarly, I expect that the more copartisans who request assignment to a particular committee, and thus the greater amount of competition for that committee's seats, will make a request for that seat less likely to be granted. I specifically include a variable for requests to exclusive committee assignments, which I anticipate will be negative due to the committees' popularity and outsized influence in the policymaking process. Party leaders are further constrained by the importance of different committees to various states. Some states assert ownership over seats on committees with jurisdictions that govern significant industries in the state, such as financial services for New York and New Jersey. I use two different state centered variables. First, I include a variable, *Open State Seat* that indicates whether a member is requesting a seat on a committee that another member of their state delegation just left. I expect that this will be associated with a greater likelihood of obtaining a requested assignment. The other state variable, *State Representation*, takes on a value of 1 if a member is requesting to be on a committee where another member of the state delegation already sits. I also interact seniority with era to see whether there is a change in how traditional, clearly defined criteria to gain a seat has changed after the committee reforms. Finally, I have a variable indicating whether a member made a request for the same committee in the previous Congress.

Empirical Results

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 contains the first stage results of the Heckman models, which estimates the circumstances under which a member will make a request. In both parties, more senior members are less likely to request new committee assignments. This result is intuitively sensible. As discussed earlier, members rarely make requests after their second term, and would likely not want to give up seniority that they have accrued over time on the committees on which they sit, unless they were confident about their chances of improving their assignment. For Republicans, members of the leadership are less likely to request a new assignment, as they are likely already satisfied with their placement. For the Democrats, members who are ideologically closer to the party median are more likely to make requests, as well as members who have donated less to their party's campaign funds.

Table 6 shows the second stage of the selection model, estimating the determinants of receiving a requested committee assignment for Republicans. There is little and inconsistent evidence for the loyalty models. Lower ideological distance between a member and the party median is associated with a greater chance of the member being granted their preferred assignment in the partisan era. However, there is no statistically distinguishable effect for party unity voting or campaign contributions. The accommodation hypothesis performs better. Members are more likely to gain their favored assignment when the committees the member requests are larger, when the party has gained more seats in the last election, and when a member requests assignment to a committee with a seat previously held by someone from their state. Republicans were less likely to get their preferred committee assignments when they requested assignment to a committee that had many other copartisan requesters and when they requested assignment to an exclusive committee.

Table 7 shows the results for Democratic requesters. I do not find that the loyalty variables are significant, nor are their interactions with era. However, the interaction between seniority and era is negative and statistically reliable, indicating that the effect of seniority

Table 4: First Stage of a Heckman Model Estimating the Determinants of a Republican Member Requesting a Committee Assignment

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Request Made		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Vote Percentage	−0.003 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	−0.002 (0.003)
Leadership	−0.628** (0.235)	−0.583* (0.230)	−0.581* (0.237)
Party Swing	−0.005* (0.002)	−0.006** (0.002)	−0.005** (0.002)
Seniority	−0.341** (0.018)	−0.287** (0.020)	−0.337** (0.018)
Ideological Distance	−0.082 (0.188)		
Party Unity		−0.001 (0.003)	
Logged Campaign Contributions Made			−0.011 (0.007)
Constant	1.330** (0.198)	0.833* (0.334)	1.284** (0.183)
Observations	1,920	1,620	1,920
Log Likelihood	−902.017	−763.792	−901.026
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,816.034	1,539.584	1,814.052
<i>Note:</i> p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01			

Table 5: First Stage of a Heckman Model Estimating the Determinants of a Democratic Member Requesting a Committee Assignment

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Request Made		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Vote Percentage	−0.003 (0.002)	−0.002 (0.003)	−0.003 (0.002)
Leadership	−0.071 (0.237)	−0.132 (0.230)	−0.078 (0.238)
Party Swing	0.0001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)
Seniority	−0.304** (0.017)	−0.247** (0.018)	−0.290** (0.017)
Ideological Distance	−0.675** (0.149)		
Party Unity		−0.001 (0.003)	
Logged Campaign Contributions Made			−0.019* (0.007)
Constant	1.028** (0.175)	0.471 (0.328)	0.831** (0.171)
Observations	2,248	1,999	2,248
Log Likelihood	−897.876	−750.381	−905.051
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,807.752	1,512.762	1,822.101

Note: p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01

Table 6: Second Stage of Heckman Model of the Determinants of Republican Committee Assignments

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Request Granted		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ideological Distance x Era	−0.423* (0.211)		
Party Unity x Era		0.006 (0.004)	
Log Amount Contributed x Era			0.009 (0.008)
Vote Percentage	−0.002 (0.002)	−0.004 (0.002)	−0.003* (0.002)
Exclusive Committee Request	0.001 (0.038)	0.092 (0.050)	−0.009 (0.038)
Open State Seat	0.132** (0.036)	0.126** (0.047)	0.126** (0.036)
State Representation	−0.052 (0.035)	−0.016 (0.044)	−0.047 (0.034)
Number of Copartisan Requests	−0.020** (0.003)	−0.013** (0.004)	−0.020** (0.003)
Party Swing	0.004** (0.001)	0.009** (0.002)	0.004** (0.001)
Committee Size	0.014** (0.002)	0.009** (0.003)	0.014** (0.002)
Seniority	0.067 (0.062)	0.149 (0.083)	0.050 (0.062)
Era	0.302* (0.121)	−0.373 (0.400)	0.080 (0.071)
Ideological Distance	0.262 (0.168)		
Party Unity		0.005 (0.002)	
Log Amount Contributed			0.004 (0.006)
Previous Request Made	0.041 (0.051)	0.028 (0.052)	0.038 (0.051)
Era x Seniority	−0.007 (0.019)	−0.013 (0.022)	−0.013 (0.020)
Constant	0.121 (0.147)	−0.002 (0.271)	0.310** (0.115)
Observations	1,920	1,620	1,920
R ²	0.169	0.145	0.171
Adjusted R ²	0.152	0.117	0.154
ρ	−0.543	−0.931	−0.425
Inverse Mills Ratio	−0.257 (0.256)	−0.608 (0.370)	−0.194 (0.261)

Note:

on determining committee assignments is greatly diminished in the party era. This result could show a movement away from deterministic criteria for committee assignments in favor of more particularistic and idiosyncratic considerations. Like in the previous model, the accommodation hypothesis is better supported. It is easier to gain assignment to larger committees, and harder to get placed on the more competitive exclusive committees.

Discussion

I find little evidence that the effect of loyalty changed with changing Steering Committee rules. In this section, I discuss various potential explanations for the null result, in light of the qualitative evidence that we should expect an increased effect of loyalty. First, I contend that party leaders are acting in an accommodating capacity rather than a loyalist one. Party leaders have many different pressures when determining committee assignments. Above all, leaders want to obtain and retain majority status, and the best way to do that is to ensure that a member is equipped to represent their district well. Party leaders thus likely want to accommodate as many members as they can, while constrained by the number of available seats and how competitive each committee is. The empirical results support this idea of constrained optimization, with strong negative coefficients across almost every model for whether a popular power committee was requested, and positive coefficients for committee size. Further, Republicans were less likely to receive requested assignments when there were higher numbers of requests for the same slots, and more likely to receive assignments when a member can claim that a seat belongs to their state. Committee characteristics having more explanatory power than individual-level characteristics indicates a leadership that aims to satisfy as many members as possible. Party leaders are still trying to solve the giant jigsaw puzzle.

Beyond the accommodation model, there are some other potential explanations for the

Table 7: Second Stage of the Heckman Model of Democratic Committee Assignments

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Granted1		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ideological Distance x Era	-0.252 (0.262)		
Party Unity x Era		-0.007 (0.005)	
Log Amount Contributed x Era			-0.002 (0.009)
Vote Percentage	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Exclusive Committee Request	-0.232** (0.045)	-0.247** (0.056)	-0.236** (0.045)
Open State Seat	0.024 (0.039)	-0.007 (0.051)	0.024 (0.039)
State Representation	0.055 (0.039)	0.087 (0.050)	0.057 (0.038)
Party Request	0.005* (0.003)	0.008* (0.003)	0.005* (0.003)
Party Swing	-0.003* (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)
Committee Size	0.014** (0.003)	0.012** (0.004)	0.014** (0.003)
Seniority	0.053 (0.101)	-0.040 (0.177)	0.085 (0.112)
Era	0.471** (0.133)	1.026* (0.416)	0.391** (0.073)
Ideological Distance	0.146 (0.260)		
Party Unity		0.004 (0.003)	
Log Amount Contributed			0.005 (0.008)
Previous Request	-0.027 (0.056)	-0.037 (0.058)	-0.041 (0.056)
Seniority x Era	-0.069** (0.021)	-0.070** (0.024)	-0.066** (0.021)
Constant	-0.475** (0.145)	-1.046* (0.467)	-0.412* (0.177)
Observations	2,248	1,999	2,248
R ²	0.164	0.153	0.164
Adjusted R ²	0.142	0.117	0.141
ρ	0.199	0.845	-0.172
Inverse Mills Ratio	0.085 (0.445)	0.530 (0.886)	-0.073 (0.506)

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

null result on loyalty. It may be the case that the steering committees were using consistent criteria to determine committee assignments before there was formal leadership representation. Even when the Republican Steering Committee was dominated by regional representatives, their interests were not solely parochial. Members of the old steering committees still wanted to gain majority party status and increase the size of their coalition. Similar to how Smith and Ray (1983) and Cox and McCubbins (2007) did not find any significant changes in the way that the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee made committee assignments before and after the reforms of the 1970s, the overriding party interest may have already been baked into the process. Finally, the null result may be due to the difficulty of capturing loyalty as leaders and members think of it. Party leaders account for strategic disloyalty for members in cross-pressured districts, and may reward members who make difficult votes for the party, even if their overall loyalty scores are lower (See Baker 1985; Kirkland 2017; Meinke 2022). As Meinke (2022) shows, leaders keep track of what members are with the party when the leadership needs them, but not in ways that are clear or public until leaders archive their papers. Beyond that, different leaders may conceptualize loyalty in particular ways that do not lend themselves to quantitative analysis that pools multiple leaders across time. Many now see donations to party campaign committees as mandatory for gaining the most prestigious committee slots, when no leader before Hastert made them a clear requirement for advancement. Idiosyncratic, leader-based personal loyalty highlights how ephemeral these characteristics can be. Representative Rice’s vote against Pelosi’s speakership, for example, may not be as damning after Hakeem Jeffries takes over the Democratic leadership.

Conclusion

The opening of the 118th Congress was delayed by a speakership battle that saw Republican leader Kevin McCarthy face the recalcitrant House Freedom Caucus, made up of the most conservative Republicans. In their published list of requested changes to House and party rules, they mentioned steering committee reform, arguing that it had become an arm of the speaker and required more regional representation to better suit the whole party. In the end, the Freedom Caucus folded, but was not punished for their rabble-rousing. Many of the members obtained or retained good committee assignments, including three who were appointed to the Rules Committee. The new speaker, with an eye toward the slim majority his party enjoyed and the necessity to placate divisive groups like the Freedom Caucus, made assignments that were about more than loyalty.

In this paper I have characterized changes in the committee assignment process in the House of Representatives, with a particular focus on the changing role of party loyalty in determining what members receive requested committee assignments. I find that journalistic accounts, as well as the direct words of both committee aspirants and party leaders, show a stronger emphasis on party loyalty in the modern era. However, I am unable to demonstrate that finding in my empirical results. The disharmony in these two findings serves to highlight that party leaders and their associated steering committees operate under numerous pressures, and that their ability to reward loyalty or punish dissent on an individual level is limited by broader party goals. Instead, I find evidence that party leaders are trying to accommodate their members, but are constrained by things like committee size and the popularity of different committees.

This study advances previous studies of committee assignment politics in multiple ways. I explained how the process for assigning members to committees changed with steering committee reforms in the 1990s and found that, in spite of that, the main factors determining whether a member gains a requested committee assignment are largely unchanged. This result speaks to a limit on the extent to which party leaders can use committee assignments

as a way to spur loyalty. This study also represents a methodological advancement, as I explicitly model the choice to make a committee request as the first stage to whether a request is granted.

Appendix

Heckman Selection Models

Heckman selection models are meant to solve the problem of non-random selection into treatment. In the case of this paper, I am interested in the factors that determine which members are successfully assigned to their requested committees. However, not every member requests to be on a committee, and members do not choose to request a committee randomly. Thus, there is the possibility of selection bias. Consider an example where members choose to make a committee request because they were extremely loyal in the previous Congress, but the party leader then chooses from that subset based on the requester's seniority. An analysis that compares members that had their requests granted to all other members would conclude that party loyalty was very important to member success, even though that was not how the committee assignment process actually functioned. Heckman models have received wide use in political science as a way of accounting for selection bias (see, for example, Bömelt 2010, Drury et al. 2005, Hug 2010, Lebovic 2004, Plümper et al 2006) with a two step correction that first models the selection using probit and then the outcome variable is regressed on exogenous characteristics and fitted values from the selection equation (Heckman 1979; Verbeek 2000). However, recent research has cast doubt on the validity of this model in applied literature (Vance and Ritter 2014; Wofolds and Siegal 2018). Identification is possible in the Heckman model through the exclusion restriction. To satisfy the exclusion restriction, one needs a valid instrument, a variable that affects selection but not the outcome equation. When one does not have a valid instrument, the estimates may be inaccurate.

The problem of selection is compounded by the sequential nature of the assignment request process. Members decide whether to send a request letter, and then their request can be successfully granted or not. Members who do not request a new committee assignment can never have their request granted, regardless of whether they change committee assignments. This creates an asymmetric strategy set where there is no true counterfactual (Slough 2021).

These considerations present significant modeling challenges, and so here I offer two modeling strategies. The first set estimates a model where the outcome variable is whether a request was granted and uses only observations where a request was made. Implicitly, this model assumes that selection bias is not present. The second set of models are multinomial logistic regression that flatten the strategy set into categorical variables, where the outcomes are “no request made,” “request made,” and “request made and granted.”

Alternative Modeling Strategies

First, I present models that only use observations where a request was made in Table A.1 for Republicans and Table A.2 for Democrats. These models produce results that are very similar to the ones presented in the main paper, where loyalty variables are not statistically distinguishable from zero, but accommodation variables, like committee size and exclusivity, are significant and in the expected direction.

In Tables A.3 through A.8, I subvert the selection problem by flattening the sequence by making the outcome categorical, as recommended in Slough (2021). I thus create a new outcome variable where the categories are members who did not make a request to be on a new committee, members who made a request, and members who made a request that was granted. I use members not making the request the base against which the other two are compared. This modeling strategy speaks to a subtly different question than the one in the main paper, it separately compares the determinants of making a request and making a request that was granted against members that did not make a request overall. This approach makes independent variables that are factors of the requested committees, like the size of the committee, nonsensical. I instead use a single variable that is the number of committee seats that a member’s party has that Congress. Tables A3, A4, and A5 use the loyalty variables of ideological distance, party unity, and log amount contributed respectively for Republicans, while tables A6, A7, and A8 replicate that for Democrats

Across the board, these models provide support for the accommodation hypothesis. Un-

A.1: Logistic Regression of the Determinants of Republican Committee Assignments Among Requesters

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Granted1		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ideological Distance \times Era	-2.352 (1.211)		
Party Unity \times Era		0.018 (0.027)	
Log Amount Contributed \times Era			0.062 (0.045)
Size of Requested Committee	0.077** (0.014)	0.049** (0.016)	0.079** (0.014)
Vote Percent	-0.015 (0.008)	-0.020* (0.010)	-0.020* (0.009)
Exclusive	0.022 (0.208)	0.508 (0.288)	-0.020 (0.209)
Open State Seat	0.626** (0.189)	0.630* (0.258)	0.610** (0.188)
State Representation	-0.345 (0.189)	-0.198 (0.246)	-0.317 (0.187)
Number of Party Requests	-0.095** (0.018)	-0.057* (0.024)	-0.096** (0.018)
Party Swing	0.015** (0.005)	0.032** (0.008)	0.019** (0.006)
Seniority	0.031 (0.090)	0.153 (0.116)	0.027 (0.090)
Era	1.527* (0.703)	-0.898 (2.532)	0.298 (0.392)
Ideological Distance	1.418 (0.989)		
Party Unity		0.028 (0.015)	
Log Amount Contributed			0.002 (0.038)
Previous Request Made	0.281 (0.280)	0.121 (0.294)	0.256 (0.280)
Seniority \times Era	-0.025 (0.110)	-0.102 (0.145)	-0.071 (0.115)
Constant	-1.912* (0.821)	-3.811* (1.557)	-0.865 (0.623)
Observations	698	441	698
Log Likelihood	-382.045	-234.402	-380.931
Akaike Inf. Crit.	792.089	496.803	789.862
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01	

A.2: Logistic Regression of the Determinants of Democratic Committee Assignments Among Requesters

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Granted1		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Ideological Distance \times Era	-1.933 (1.525)		
Party Unity \times Era		-0.038 (0.026)	
Log Amount Contributed \times Era			0.005 (0.049)
Committee Size	0.092** (0.020)	0.076** (0.026)	0.096** (0.021)
Vote Percent	0.007 (0.008)	0.013 (0.010)	0.005 (0.008)
Exclusive Committee Request	-1.234** (0.279)	-1.186** (0.333)	-1.315** (0.287)
Open State Seat	0.152 (0.226)	0.049 (0.281)	0.155 (0.226)
State Representation	0.189 (0.230)	0.231 (0.277)	0.200 (0.228)
Number of Party Requests	0.028 (0.016)	0.043* (0.020)	0.030 (0.016)
Party Swing	-0.016* (0.007)	-0.014 (0.009)	-0.018* (0.008)
Seniority	0.411** (0.084)	0.373** (0.106)	0.396** (0.085)
Era	2.832** (0.777)	5.545* (2.394)	2.131** (0.441)
Ideological Distance	1.192 (1.017)		
Party Unity		0.024 (0.016)	
Log Amount Contributed			0.036 (0.032)
Previous Request Made	-0.034 (0.324)	-0.115 (0.331)	-0.123 (0.321)
Seniority \times Era	-0.416** (0.132)	-0.413* (0.172)	-0.415** (0.137)
Constant	-5.806** (0.895)	-7.734** (1.775)	-5.583** (0.886)
Observations	509	325	509
Log Likelihood	-261.504	-174.578	-261.262
Akaike Inf. Crit.	551.007	377.155	550.524
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01	

A.3: Multinomial Logistic Regression Model for Determinants of Republican Committee Request and Assignment Using Ideological Distance

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Request Made	Made and Granted
	(1)	(2)
Party Committee Seats	−0.0002 (0.001)	0.022** (0.001)
Ideological Distance \times Era	−1.144** (0.236)	−0.850** (0.311)
Ideological Distance	0.732* (0.288)	0.416 (0.330)
Era	0.818** (0.259)	−1.876** (0.323)
Vote Percent	−0.001 (0.005)	−0.016* (0.008)
Party Swing	0.010** (0.004)	0.012** (0.004)
Seniority	0.632** (0.054)	0.054 (0.086)
Era \times Seniority	−0.017 (0.073)	−0.214 (0.110)
Constant	−1.940** (0.099)	−8.368** (0.113)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,615.743	2,615.743
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

A.4: Multinomial Logistic Regression Model for Determinants of Republican Committee Request and Assignment Using Party Loyalty

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Request Made	Made and Granted
	(1)	(2)
Party Committee Seats	−0.007** (0.002)	0.008** (0.003)
PartyUnity \times Era	0.008 (0.005)	0.020* (0.008)
PartyUnity	0.007 (0.006)	0.019 (0.011)
Era	1.711** (0.003)	−1.646** (0.002)
Vote Percent	−0.006 (0.005)	−0.015 (0.009)
Party Swing	0.016** (0.005)	0.023** (0.007)
Seniority	0.704** (0.068)	0.147 (0.117)
Era \times Seniority	−0.234** (0.082)	−0.240 (0.141)
Constant	0.263** (0.002)	−5.271** (0.004)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,022.386	2,022.386
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

A.5: Multinomial Logistic Regression Model for Determinants of Republican Committee Request and Assignment Using Party Contributions

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Request Made	Made and Granted
	(1)	(2)
Party Committee Seats	0.0001 (0.001)	0.022** (0.001)
Log Amount Contributed \times Era	0.063* (0.029)	0.033 (0.043)
Log Amount Contributed	−0.005 (0.022)	−0.001 (0.037)
Era	0.033 (0.336)	−2.354** (0.415)
Vote Percent	−0.004 (0.005)	−0.018* (0.008)
Party Swing	0.013** (0.004)	0.014** (0.004)
Seniority	0.634** (0.055)	0.057 (0.089)
Era \times Seniority	−0.058 (0.075)	−0.243* (0.117)
Constant	−1.482** (0.132)	−8.130** (0.144)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,608.544	2,608.544

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

A.6: Multinomial Logistic Regression Model for Determinants of Democratic Committee Request and Assignment Using Ideological Distance

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Request Made	Made and Granted
	(1)	(2)
Party Committee Seats	−0.007** (0.001)	0.021** (0.001)
Ideological Distance \times Era	−0.532 (0.664)	−3.266** (0.409)
Ideological Distance	1.268* (0.576)	1.083 (0.599)
Era	0.757* (0.335)	6.107** (0.418)
Vote Percent	0.003 (0.005)	0.010 (0.007)
Party Swing	−0.006 (0.005)	−0.014* (0.007)
Seniority	0.878** (0.063)	0.468** (0.075)
Era \times Seniority	−0.373** (0.084)	−0.598** (0.122)
Constant	1.384** (0.227)	−14.673** (0.181)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,231.568	2,231.568
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

A.7: Multinomial Logistic Regression Model for Determinants of Democratic Committee Request and Assignment Using Party Unity

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Request Made	Made and Granted
	(1)	(2)
Party Committee Seats	−0.006** (0.002)	0.019** (0.002)
PartyUnity \times Era	−0.018 (0.009)	−0.044** (0.008)
Party Unity	0.016* (0.007)	0.027* (0.012)
Era	1.665* (0.675)	7.545** (0.308)
Vote Percent	0.005 (0.005)	0.016 (0.008)
Party Swing	−0.007 (0.005)	−0.015 (0.008)
Seniority	0.700** (0.069)	0.382** (0.087)
Era \times Seniority	−0.169 (0.097)	−0.420** (0.146)
Constant	0.526 (0.356)	−15.795** (0.167)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,786.525	1,786.525
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

A.8: Multinomial Logistic Regression Model for Determinants of Democratic Committee Request and Assignment Using Party Contributions

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Request Made	Made and Granted
	(1)	(2)
Party Committee Seats	−0.006** (0.001)	0.019** (0.001)
Log Amount Contributed \times Era	−0.045 (0.032)	−0.032 (0.046)
Log Amount Contributed	0.026 (0.022)	0.015 (0.031)
Era	1.117** (0.248)	4.452** (0.337)
Vote Percent	0.006 (0.005)	0.008 (0.007)
Party Swing	−0.006 (0.005)	−0.012 (0.007)
Seniority	0.851** (0.064)	0.447** (0.077)
Era \times Seniority	−0.331** (0.088)	−0.565** (0.131)
Constant	0.969** (0.063)	−13.188** (0.089)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,243.721	2,243.721
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.05; **p<0.01

der every model, members are more likely to make requests and have that request granted than to not make a request when committees are larger. Again, similar to the models in the paper, the loyalty interactions are inconsistent. In both parties, the interaction between ideological distance from the party median and era are negative and significant for the outcome of members who had their request granted. That indicates that members who are closer to the party median are more likely to earn a favored assignment. This finding supports the contention that ideology was a greater consideration after the changes to the steering committees that allowed more leadership participation. The other loyalty variables, however, do not provide as clear a picture. For the interaction between party unity and era, the Republicans have a positive coefficient for the outcome of having a request made and granted, while the Democrats have a negative coefficient. The estimates are consistent with theoretical expectations and journalistic accounts for Republicans but not for Democrats. For Democrats, this could be the result of rewarding members who were strategically disloyal who toed the party line when needed, but voted more moderately otherwise. In both parties, the effect of party contributions is indistinguishable from zero for the outcome of having a request made and granted, though for Republicans, there is a positive association between making contributions and requesting a new seat. These estimates justify inferences similar to the ones in the paper, though there is stronger support for a strengthened role of party loyalty. In all cases, party leaders are trying to accommodate as many members as possible and still solve the giant jigsaw puzzle.

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