Oxford Handbooks Online

Congressional Committees

C. Lawrence Evans

The Oxford Handbook of the American Congress
Edited by George C. Edwards III, Frances E. Lee, and Eric Schickler

Print Publication Date: Mar 2011 Subject: Political Science, U.S. Politics, Political Institutions
Online Publication Date: May 2011 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199559947.003.0018

Abstract and Keywords

This article outlines significant changes that have happened in congressional scholarship as it relates to committees. This article argues that the transformation of committee research reflects the emergence of rational choice modeling and increased methodological sophistication within the field of political science. While congressional scholars have often led the way in formulating and testing formal methods of politics, the transformation of committee scholarship has also arisen from important changes that have occurred within Congress since the 1960s, specifically the growing importance of party cleavages on the major issues of today. These changes have made the institution more open to rational choice analysis. The scholarly attention which is now devoted to internal committee operations and decision-making also created avenues for new research. Even within a Congress polarized along party lines, most significant legislative decisions remain to occur within the committee stage of the process, and the majority of the questions raised concerning congressional committees by the previous scholars remain relevant in Congress today.

Keywords: congressional scholarship, rational choice modeling, committee, Congress, congressional committees

PRIOR to the mid-1970s much of the most prominent scholarship about Congress concerned the internal operations and policy impact of its standing committees. Richard Fenno's classic, *Congressmen in Committees*, was the most influential of the landmark committee studies of the period. Other examples include studies of the House Agriculture Committee by Charles O. Jones, the Ways and Means and Finance Committees by John Manley, and David Price's book-length study of legislative innovation in three Senate committees. Foundational research about the history of the committee system also appeared in the 1960s and early 1970s, with Nelson Polsby producing influential articles about the importance of seniority in the selection of committee chairs, and Joseph Cooper

illuminating the early origins and development of House committees. It is not much of an exaggeration to assert that political scientists of the era primarily viewed the Congress through the lens of its standing committees.

Now fast-forward forty years. Since then, the elaboration of rational choice theories of congressional behavior and institutions; the development of sophisticated new techniques for analyzing the roll-call record; a renewed interest in congressional history; and other achievements, have fundamentally altered and mostly improved the scholarly literature about Congress. Yet, the attention paid by political scientists to the internal operations of House and Senate committees has declined markedly, as have studies that consider the different ways that individual panels relate to outside constituencies or the parent chamber. Instead, contemporary scholars tend to focus more on party control of committees and whether key features of the House and Senate committee systems are consistent with competing rational choice models of (p. 397) congressional organization writ large. For the most part, congressional scholarship is no longer committee-centric.

This chapter reviews the important changes that have occurred in congressional scholarship as it relates to committees. The main argument is that the transformation of committee research reflects the rise of rational choice modeling and increased methodological sophistication within the discipline of political science. Indeed, congressional scholars often have led the way in formulating and testing formal models of politics. But the transformation of committee scholarship also arises from significant changes that have occurred within Congress since the 1960s, especially the growing importance of party cleavages on the major issues of the day. These changes have made the institution even more amenable to rational choice analysis. The reduced scholarly attention now devoted to internal committee operations and decision- making, however, also creates opportunities for significant new research. Even within a Congress polarized along party lines, most important legislative decisions still occur during the committee stage of the process, and most of the questions raised about congressional committees by previous generations of scholars are still relevant in the contemporary Congress. Indeed, a close examination of how and why scholarship about congressional committees has been transformed highlights important empirical and normative questions that have been under-explored in recent years, providing useful guidance for future work.

Foundational studies

Although committee scholarship dates to Woodrow Wilson's (1885) book-length argument that “Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work,” the systematic analysis of committees first emerged as a centerpiece of congressional research during the 1960s. Richard F. Fenno, Jr. (1962a, 1965), Charles O. Jones (1961, 1962), and John Manley (1969, 1970) produced the foundational studies.[1] The 1960s, it should be emphasized, were characterized by low levels of partisan polarization relative to most other periods in congressional history. According to the best measures, the two political parties in Congress were unified internally, and sharply differentiated from one another from the late 1870s until the New Deal, at which point party polarization declined. Polarization continued to be muted until the early 1970s, and then rose steadily during the 1980s and 1990s, eventually reaching historic highs during the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The early committee studies of Fenno, Jones, (p. 398) and their contemporaries, in other words, were conducted during an unusual period on Capitol Hill when cross-partisan coalitions were commonplace.

This matters because there is evidence that the importance and operating autonomy of standing committees are inversely related to the extent of partisan polarization within the parent chamber (Cooper and Brady 1981; Rohde 1991; Maltzman 1997). As the majority party becomes more unified internally about the major issues of the day, and the gulf between the policy preferences of majority and minority party members widens, party leaders become more central to the legislative process and the influence and autonomy of committees tends to decline. Conversely, lower levels of partisan polarization are associated with stronger committees and relatively weak party leaders. Internal disagreements within the majority party tend to make rank-and-file members less willing to delegate significant control over the agenda to their leaders because the leadership might use these powers to advance a policy program contrary to their views and the interests of their constituents. Instead, the preference of rank-and-file members is that power be centered more within the committee system, where the interests that stand to gain or lose the most in a policy area are disproportionately represented. In short, research about the internal operations of standing committees was at the center of congressional scholarship during the 1960s, in part because the regular presence of cross-partisan coalitions meant that committees played an especially important role in congressional decision- making.

The catalyst for the first wave of committee scholarship was Fenno's (1962a, 1965) research about the two Appropriations Committees, which have jurisdiction over discretionary federal spending, “the historic bulwark of legislative authority [1965, xiii].” How, Fenno asked, were the two Appropriations Committees able to reconcile, or “integrate,” the divergent interests, coalitions, and roles that were apparent among members and the outside constituencies affected by the panels' work? As part of the

study, he conducted personal interviews with more than 170 members and staff, examined hearings transcripts and other committee documents, and compiled extensive data about spending requests, committee recommendations, and outcomes at the agency level. Over four decades later, his book about appropriations politics, *The Power of the Purse*, remains the most comprehensive and substantively rich analysis ever conducted about a congressional committee.

Among other findings, Fenno discovered that the House panel, and to a lesser extent its Senate counterpart, was able to achieve high levels of integration through shared norms that emphasized budgetary austerity and the promotion of committee prestige and autonomy. The committee's ability to minimize internal conflict was enhanced by the stability of its membership from Congress to Congress, and the nature of the Appropriations jurisdiction. Appropriations makes decisions about dollars and cents, program by program, rather than questions that inherently are ideologically divisive, facilitating compromise. Within the Appropriations Committees, thirteen semi-autonomous subcommittees made most of the decisions. Fenno argued that norms of legislative specialization and reciprocity undergirded the remarkable (p. 399) deference of the full panel toward the recommendations of its subcommittees, and also of the full House and Senate to the legislation reported by the two committees.

The concepts that structured Fenno's groundbreaking study of the Appropriations Committees—integration, member roles, and norms for resolving conflict and promoting specialization—mostly derived from the literature about structural func- tionalism that was influential at the time among sociologists. Precisely because the Appropriations Committees did appear to operate as relatively autonomous “subsystems” of the parent House and Senate, with stable patterns of decision-making and shared expectations about member behavior, the functionalist concepts helped Fenno describe and explain the work of the two panels.

Other scholars attempted to apply and extend Fenno's conceptual framework to other committees and jurisdictions. Jones (1961, 1962), for example, produced two important articles about the House Agriculture Committee that were strongly influenced by Fenno's appropriations research. His substantive focus was on how members used the Agriculture panel to promote the interests of farmers and the broader agricultural community. Like Fenno, he relied heavily on personal interviews with members and staff. Jones found that members of the Agriculture Committee disproportionately came from districts that depended economically on farming, and that the internal structure of the panel reflected the salient commodity interests and agricultural problems of the day. Separate subcommittees dealt with cotton, dairy products, livestock, and feed grains, for example, while other subcommittees were granted jurisdiction over soil conservation, crop insurance, and agricultural trade. Jones also found that the norms that fostered integration within the Appropriations panel were apparent in the internal operations of the Agriculture Committee. Compared to Appropriations, however, there was significantly less “integration” and more partisanship within Agriculture because the constituency interests of Democrats and Republicans over farming differed substantially. Members

from both parties joined the committee to promote the commodity interests of their districts, but Democrats were especially likely to represent areas that produced cotton, rice, and tobacco, while Republicans mostly came from districts heavy in wheat, corn, and small grains. Divergent commodity interests produced partisan conflict, undermining committee integration. To some extent, committee leaders were able to dampen this conflict by combining commodity-specific policies into larger “omnibus” packages of importance to both Democratic and GOP farm districts, but overall the panel was less integrated and autonomous (relative to the full chamber) than was the Appropriations Committee as described by Fenno.

Manley's (1969, 1970) study of the House Committee on Ways and Means, which considered tax issues, major entitlement programs, and trade, was likewise shaped by Fenno's appropriations research. And he also relied heavily on field research and participant-observation for evidence. As was the case with Agriculture, the Ways and Means jurisdiction generated regular disagreements between Democrats and Republicans, but the potential for partisanship was more firmly rooted in ideological differences between the political parties, rather than the geographic incidence of **(p. 400)** commodity interests. As a result, the functionalist concepts that Fenno used were less helpful and he turned instead to the sociological literature on small groups, which emphasized exchange relationships, especially the balance between the rewards and benefits of committee service, on the one hand, and the expectations and costs of that service, on the other. But “norms” also were an important conceptual ingredient of Manley's research. He claimed that the Ways and Means Committee was characterized by norms of restrained partisanship, which in turn were maintained via inducements like the electoral value, prestige, and intra-chamber influence associated with service on the panel.

Manley's most significant contribution to congressional scholarship, however, was his memorable analysis of the leadership style and influence of Ways and Means Chair Wilbur Mills, then widely viewed as the most powerful committee leader on Capitol Hill. In a significant departure from most existing treatments of legislative leadership, Manley emphasized the importance of context over personal traits and skills. Mills' influence, he argued, derived from his sensitivity to the expectations and preferences of other committee members and the mood of the full House. Rather than rely on formal powers or prerogatives, in other words, his policymaking role was based on persuasion and the discretion that other lawmakers extended to him because of his responsiveness to their needs, reputation for fairness and diligence, and ability to build winning coalition on the floor. Mills' stature was further enhanced by his pivotal position on the panel between voting blocs. Often he was the swing vote on major committee legislation. Manley's conceptualization of legislative leadership, especially the impact of context on leadership style, quickly became a classic in the field and influenced a generation of scholarship about congressional leadership.

Other important studies of committee politics were conducted during this period. Masters (1961) and Bullock (1970, 1972), for example, produced the first major articles about the process through which members are assigned to committees. As mentioned, Cooper (1970) provided the first systematic description of the early development of House committees. Polsby (1968, and with Gallaher and Rundquist, 1969) shed significant new light on the emergence of seniority as a norm for selecting committee leaders (see Schickler in this volume). Prior to the 1911 revolt against Speaker Joseph Cannon, Polsby and his colleagues discovered, uncompensated violations of seniority were fairly common. After the Cannon revolt, power in the House devolved from party leaders to the standing committee system and such violations became less frequent. Following adoption of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, the blueprint of the modern committee system, seniority became the nearly automatic criterion for selecting chairs, and remained so until the recentralization of power in the speakership during the 1980s and 1990s. Interestingly, the committee research of this period often featured extensive analysis of the contents of legislation. For instance, in his book, *Who Makes the Laws*, Price (1972) examined the legislative work of three Senate committees during 1965–6, arguably the most productive Congress since World War II. Price found that the ability of the Senate to compete for power with activist President Lyndon Johnson depended on the legislative creativity that occurred within its standing committees. The bottom line? As the decade of the 1960s (p. 401) came to a close, by most accounts committees were the central organizational feature of Congress, and scholarship about the House and Senate committee systems was at the heart of legislative studies as a sub-field.[2]

The turn to rational choice

Legislative scholarship changed markedly during the 1970s. Building on the pioneering work of Riker (1958), Mayhew (1974), and Fiorina (1974), scholars increasingly applied rational choice theory to the study of Congress, producing a research agenda that often was characterized as “the new institutionalism” (Shepsle 1986). In contrast to the sociologically grounded work prevalent during the 1960s, the rational choice perspective emphasized the goals of individual members and the purposive, rational pursuit of these goals subject to opportunities and constraints in the legislative arena and the broader political environment, especially member constituencies. The turn to rational choice theory resulted in part from intellectual efforts to devise more rigorously deductive theories of political behavior patterned on the economics discipline and game theory. But rational choice theory also resonated with developments in congressional politics underway at the time. As a result of the enfranchisement of African Americans following passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the majority Democratic caucus became more internally unified in both the House and Senate. Energized party liberals dramatically scaled back the formal powers of committee chairs and broke the back of the Conservative Coalition. Power shifted from the chairs toward rank-and-file members, and also to centralized party leaders (Rohde 1991). Congressional campaigns also became

more candidate-centered during the late 1960s. Especially after the Watergate scandal of 1973–4, there was an influx of new, highly independent, members. The expansion of government programs that accompanied Lyndon Johnson's “Great Society” also produced a larger and more active interest group environment for the legislative branch (Sinclair 1989, 1995). For all of these reasons, the Congress of the 1970s was far more individualistic and permeable toward outside interests than had been the more stable and insular institution of the 1960s. With its focus on the purposive behavior of individual political actors, rational choice theory was more useful for understanding these changes than were the sociological perspectives that had structured prior research about Congress.

In the turn to rational choice theory, Richard Fenno once again produced the pivotal committee study, *Congressmen in Committees* (1973), one of the most influential scholarly books written about the national legislature. In contrast to his appropriations study, in *Congressmen in Committees* Fenno embraced the more individualistic, **(p. 402)** goal-oriented, perspective of rational choice theory (see also Fiorina in this volume). In part, his intellectual shift reflected the practical exigencies of comparing multiple committees. As Fenno wrote, “What struck me most forcefully in observing the House Appropriations Committee was the degree to which it was a self-contained social system, [but in] comparative perspective, the member contribution seems both large and distinctive [1973, xvii].” His conceptual transition towards individual behavior also reflected the intellectual climate within which he worked—the political science department at the University of Rochester. Under the leadership of William Riker and Fenno, that department had emerged as the early hub of rational choice modeling within the discipline of political science.

In *Congressmen in Committees*, Fenno famously asserted that members were primarily motivated in their committee work and other activities by three main goals: getting reelected, making good public policy, and securing influence within the chamber. His observations derived from hundreds of semi-structured interviews with members and staff conducted by Fenno himself, and also by John Manley, who served as his research assistant for the project. Fenno relied on his previous research for evidence about Appropriations and Manley shared with him his own data about the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees. In the early 1960s, Fenno (1962b) had gathered extensive evidence about the Committee on Education and Labor as part of collaborative research on federal aid to education. Together, he and Manley conducted dozens of additional interviews in Washington with members of the Committees on Interior, Post Office and Civil Service, and Foreign Affairs, producing a sample of six House committees and their Senate counterparts for comparative study. Members were drawn to the Interior and Post Office committees, Fenno observed, primarily to help their constituents and secure reelection. In contrast, lawmakers joined the Education and Labor and Foreign Affairs panels mostly to promote their view of good public policy. Members of Appropriations and Ways and Means joined those panels to enhance their influence within

the full chamber. Fenno's claims about the tri-part motivational psychology of lawmakers quickly became a staple of congressional scholarship and a central feature of textbooks about the legislative process.

Within the standing committees of Congress, Fenno maintained, members pursue their goals subject to certain environmental constraints, or clusters of interested outsiders, which vary systematically by panel and jurisdiction. Here, his conceptual framework reflected the standard language of constrained optimization featured in rational choice theories. Members of Interior, for example, pursued their reelection goals subject to opportunities and constraints created by important clientele groups, such as environmental organizations and the Forestry Association. For Ways and Means, in contrast, the executive branch and the two political parties dominated the committee environment. Fenno argued that the goal-oriented behavior of members, conditioned by elements of the relevant committee environment, shaped the internal structural operations of a panel, especially the role of subcommittees and the leadership styles of the chair and ranking minority members, and ultimately the content of committee-reported legislation.

(p. 403) Between member goals and environmental constraints, on the one hand, and a committee's internal structure and policy outputs, on the other, was an intermediate conceptual step that reflects both the subtlety of Fenno's understanding and the transitional nature of his comparative committee study. Committee members, he argued, share certain “strategic premises” that are shaped by the goals of members and the panel's environment, and which in turn influence decisions about committee structure and legislative recommendations to the floor. The concept of “strategic premise” was crucial to his analytic framework, Fenno reasoned, because it enabled him to analyze committees “less as an aggregation of individuals and more as a working group” (1973, 46). Strategic premises are similar conceptually to the norms that he and Manley had claimed shape committee decision-making in their earlier research. Fenno asserted that members of the Appropriations Committee shared two strategic premises in their committee work—reducing executive budget requests, and providing adequate funding for executive programs. The strategic premises held by Ways and Means members, in contrast, included writing legislation that could prevail on the floor, and promoting the relevant party agenda. Conceptually, then, the notion of “strategic premise” enabled Fenno to make the transition from the individual level (member goals) to the aggregate level (committee legislation). Empirically, the concept also allowed him to link his rational choice analysis in *Congressmen in Committees* back to the more functionalist perspective featured in his case study of the Appropriations panels. In contrast to his treatment of committee norms in his appropriations research, however, the strategic premises that Fenno described in his comparative study of committees derived from the goals of individual members. The book was firmly grounded in the emergent rational choice perspective on Congress.

Congressmen in Committees strongly influenced future scholarship about the operations of House and Senate committees. Interestingly, the book appeared at the beginning of a major wave of committee reform in the House. In 1973, for example, the year that the volume was published, the House Democratic Caucus opened up the process for selecting chairs and adopted the "subcommittee bill of rights," which further constrained the operating autonomy of full committee leaders (Davidson 1981). The following year, the power to appoint Democratic members to committees was shifted from the party's contingent on Ways and Means to the Steering and Policy Committee, a Democratic Party organ. The Speaker also was given effective control over the Committee on Rules and enhanced discretion over referring bills to committee (Oppenheimer 1977). And as 1974 came to a close, the Democratic Caucus ousted three senior committee chairs that were viewed as out of step with the liberal agenda. Many scholars maintained that the reforms devolved power from the full to the subcommittee level, creating policymaking practices that some called "subcommittee government." Indeed, using records of committee markups (bill writing sessions) from the post-reform period, Hall and Evans (1989) show that committee bills were primarily drafted by members of the relevant subcommittee; the amendments added to subcommittee legislation in full committee were mostly offered by members of the subcommittee; and subcommittees were seldom on the losing side of votes in full (p. 404) committee. In the decade or so following the 1970s reforms, then, subcommittees did become more institutionalized and active (see also Fiorina 1977; Haeberle 1978).

Although certain aspects of committee politics that had been richly described by Fenno were altered by the reforms of the 1970s, particularly the role of subcommittees and committee leadership styles, his main concepts and analytic framework retained their explanatory power. For instance, Price (1978) extended Fenno's concept of "environmental constraints" to better capture issue-specific factors, especially conflict between interested groups and the degree of public salience, that often vary across the different policy areas within an individual panel's jurisdiction. A decade after Fenno's study appeared, Smith and Deering (1984) produced a book-length analysis of the committee system, *Committees in Congress*, intended to capture the major changes that had occurred since the appearance of his work. Their important treatise, which has been revised and updated through two succeeding editions (1990, 1997), encompasses all House and Senate committees and includes extensive new data about diverse aspects of the committee process, ranging from assignment requests and bill referral patterns to subcommittee activity levels and floor amendments to committee legislation. Although a major, independent, contribution to the committees literature, the three editions of Smith and Deering's book closely track the analytic framework from *Congressmen in Committees*, especially Fenno's central chapter about member goals.

Perhaps the most rigorous early application of rational choice theory to congressional evidence dealt with the process through which individual lawmakers are assigned to committees. The assignment process matters substantively because it determines the distribution of policy preferences within a panel, and thus shapes committee politics. But committee assignments are also a superb topic for testing rational choice theories

because the assignment process is so clearly characterized by individual “actors in pursuit of personal goals, constrained only by scarcity and institutional procedures [Rohde and Shepsle 1973].” As part of his 1960s research on Ways and Means, Manley had gathered data about Democratic committee requests. Prior to the 1970s reforms, the placement of Democratic House members on panels had been the responsibility of their fellow partisans on the Ways and Means Committee. Ways and Means Democrats, in other words, served as the “committee on committees” (CC) for their party in the chamber. Freshmen lawmakers seeking initial assignments and returning members desiring transfers to new committees submit letters to the relevant CC (there is one for all four chamber/party contingents), listing their requests in order of preference. When there is competition for an opening, which is typical for the more popular and influential panels, the CC members weigh the strengths and weakness of competing applicants and make a choice. Manley shared the assignment request notebooks for 1961–8 with Fenno, who in turn shared them with two of his graduate students at the University of Rochester, David Rohde and Kenneth Shepsle. Prior research on the committee assignment process conducted by Masters and Bullock had relied on data about the *results* of the process. Missing was analysis of the factors that shaped member *submissions* to the CC and whether or not these requests were met. The assignment request data made such an analysis (p. 405) feasible for the first time. And these data are especially valuable for testing rational choice theories of congressional behavior because they can serve as direct indicators of member preferences, a key component of such theories.

Together, Rohde and Shepsle (1973) published a well-regarded article demonstrating that member assignment requests were shaped by district characteristics and that the CC considered a range of factors, including constituency interests, party loyalty, and seniority, when making choices between members competing for the same opening. The most comprehensive and authoritative application of rational choice theory to the committee assignment process, however, was Shepsle's 1978 book, *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle*. Interestingly, Shepsle's book received only mixed reviews upon publication (e.g. Hinckley 1979), but in the years that followed it set the standard for empirically testing rational choice models of congressional organization.

Conceptually and empirically, Shepsle's book was a significant elaboration of his article with Rohde. For one, he developed a formal model of member assignment requests in which the probability that a member asks for a particular panel is a function of that legislator's valuation of the slot and the likelihood that the CC will grant the request. Committee valuations are influenced by the relevance of a panel to a member's constituents, the lawmaker's policy priorities, and the overall importance of the jurisdiction. Shepsle's treatment of the motivational psychology of members, then, was similar to Fenno's observations about member goals. The probability that a request was granted by the CC, Shepsle maintained, depended on whether there was a vacancy from the member's state on the committee, the degree of in-state competition for the opening, and so on. Thus, a freshman might value an assignment on Ways and Means for electoral and policy reasons, but if her state was already represented on the panel and there was significant competition for the opening (likely, given committee's power and prestige),

then the lawmaker might instead request a less desirable but more attainable committee like Banking or Public Works. Nonfreshmen seeking to transfer to a new committee followed a similar calculus, Shepsle argued, except they also considered the opportunities forgone by (possibly) giving up an existing assignment.

In the *Giant Jigsaw Puzzle*, Shepsle also modeled the responsiveness of the leadership, both in terms of negotiating committee sizes and in granting the assignment requests of individual legislators. In setting committee sizes, the leadership balanced the demand for additional slots against the desire of existing members on a panel not to "devalue" their positions by excessively expanding the committee's size. Once committee sizes, and thus the number of available openings, are set, Shepsle conceptualized the assignment choices of the CC as an optimization process in which the leadership attempts to maximize the total number of "satisfied" legislators subject to the structure of assignment opportunities. The signature strength of Shepsle's study, however, was the dozens of substantively interesting hypotheses derived from his models and put to rigorous empirical tests. It is not feasible to do full justice to these findings in a few short paragraphs, but among other results he found that the pattern of member requests was indeed consistent with the expected utility model and, especially for panels with relatively homogenous interests, these requests were closely (p. 406) associated with district characteristics and a lawmaker's personal background (e.g. past occupational associations with teaching or the union movement for Education and Labor). Interestingly, for nonfreshmen seeking transfers, the likelihood of success did not have a statistically significant relationship with the past party loyalty of the requester on roll calls.

In addition to these statistical tests using Democratic assignment data from 1958 to 1974, Shepsle also conducted dozens of interviews with members and staff. Indeed, one of the contributions of the study is a chapter in which he used this interview evidence to apply Fenno's (1973) analytic framework to decision-making on the CC. Overall, Shepsle's research provides ample evidence that the assignment process does not produce panels that are representative samples of the chamber, especially for committees with homogeneous jurisdictions. Instead, such committees tend to be populated with members that have strong constituency and personal ties to the issues that they consider. For the most prestigious committees such as Appropriations, however, the high level of competition for slots dwarfs the impact of parochialism. Shepsle's committee assignment study, in other words, strongly suggests that important features of congressional organization are shaped by multiple factors, not just constituency interests or the personal policy priorities of members, and that there is substantial variation in these causal relationships across jurisdictions and policy areas.[3]

Models of congressional organization

By the mid- to late 1980s, rational choice models essentially dominated scholarly attempts to theorize about the U.S. Congress, with significant implications for the study of committees. For the most part, these theories took the form of spatial models in which the preferences of legislators between competing policy alternatives are conceptualized as points along one or more underlying dimensions of evaluation, with members choosing the proposal that is spatially most proximate to their most preferred outcome, or ideal point. Committees are a central feature of all three leadings spatial theories of congressional organization—the distributive, informational, and partisan perspectives—but their role differs substantially across models.

The *distributive* theory is rooted in Mayhew (1974) and Fiorina (1977), but the most precise statements are probably Shepsle (1979, 1986) and Weingast and Marshall (1988). The internal procedures and structural arrangements in Congress, distributive theory posits, are intended to promote stable policy outcomes and the electoral interests of members. Committee jurisdictions are designed to reflect electorally (p. 407) relevant interests and the committee assignment process ensures that members generally will be placed on panels with turf important to the folks back home. The seniority system and a general deference to existing assignments combine to make committee positions a form of property right. As a result, the committees of Congress are comprised of “preference outliers,” or “high demand” legislators, who report bills aimed at promoting the constituency interests most affected by the jurisdiction. On the floor, other members defer to the recommendations of the committee as part of a generalized logroll across panels, and a disproportionate share of the policy benefits in the issue area are allocated to the districts of committee members. Legislative outcomes, in other words, do not reflect centrist viewpoints within the chamber as a whole, but instead the more parochial interests of high-demand constituencies.

For scholars, the basic distributive story was the most generally accepted portrait of the committee system during the 1970s and 1980s, and for good reason—it was fairly consistent with many major studies of the era. Still, there also was significant evidence that the explanatory power of the theory was somewhat limited. Fenno, for example, had emphasized that members were motivated by policy concerns and the pursuit of power, and not just by reelection. Cooper's study of the early committee system demonstrated that committees were initially intended to enhance the legislative capability of the full House and Senate, not to promote the parochial interests of high-demand constituencies. Arnold (1981) pointed out a critical feature of the federal budget that was generally understood but nonetheless under-acknowledged in the literature: most federal expenditures do not take the form of overtly distributive policies that can be targeted toward particular districts and states, and thus most expenditures are not especially conducive to the distributive politics game. In addition, a central tenet of distributive theory is that committees wield significant power within the full House and Senate. But,

some scholars asked, why would most members of the House and Senate systematically defer to committee recommendations that do not benefit their constituents? The question produced an interesting exchange in the journals that foreshadowed the spirited debate over legislative organization that would emerge within a few years.

Shepsle and Weingast (1987a, 1987b) attempted to answer the question about committee power by formulating a model in which members of the committee of jurisdiction also dominate the conference delegation responsible for ironing out differences between the House- and Senate-passed versions of a measure. In their model, a committee's control over the conference stage provides it with an "*ex post* veto" over modifications to a bill made on the House or Senate floor. Members know that if floor amendments result in a bill that the committee likes less than current law, then the committee can systematically change or even block the legislation in conference. As a result, in anticipation of the conference stage, there may be incentives for lawmakers to defer somewhat to committee recommendations on the floor. Krehbiel (1987), however, responded that conference procedures do not generally provide committees with anything like an *ex post* veto over the work of floor majorities. For example, either chamber can avoid the conference stage by playing "ping pong" and directly **(p. 408)** reporting amended legislation to the other house, or by simply accepting the other chamber's version. House rules also stipulate that the Speaker appoint a majority of conferees that support the House-passed version of the measure. Moreover, conference procedures are only used for a small fraction of bills passed by Congress. The evidence, then, is mixed that the conference procedure can translate into systematic committee power on the floor.

In another attempt to capture the institutional sources of committee power, Weingast (1989, 1992) developed a model of floor decision-making in which all members can offer amendments to a committee's bill (the functional equivalent of an open rule), but the committee is allowed a first response by offering a second-degree amendment. Indeed, in the House, the chair of the committee of jurisdiction usually does have the ability to offer second-degree amendments to floor revisions aimed at unraveling committee legislation. Using data from 1983–4, Weingast found that most amendments offered by opponents to committee bills on the floor fail, and that the unfriendly alterations that pass usually have been modified by the committee via second-degree amendments. The adoption of unfriendly floor adjustments to committee bills is rare, in other words, and when such proposals do pass, the chair is usually able to "fight fire with fire" and reduce the damage. However, as Smith (1989) shows, successful amendments to committee bills increased significantly from the 1950s to the 1980s, suggesting that committee power in the full House and Senate was in decline. Moreover, Weingast's evidence does not capture the substantive importance of opposing amendments or of the second-degree counters from committee members. Rather than fighting fire with fire, these second-degrees could be mostly face-saving devices. We simply cannot know, based on amendment counts alone. Still, in the 1970s and 1980s, when scholars generalized about

the committee system, they typically reverted to the language of distributive theory and committee power, in large part because there was no precise alternative.

Beginning with a series of influential articles co-authored with Gilligan (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1987, 1989, 1990), and then with the appearance of his 1991 book, *Information and Legislative Organization*, Keith Krehbiel provided such an alternative. The internal organization of Congress, Krehbiel argued, was not primarily designed to facilitate distributive politics and logrolling between powerful constituency groups, but instead to provide the full House and Senate with the expertise and information necessary to legislate. Krehbiel's two main assumptions were that (1) the procedural and policy choices of a legislature must be acceptable to a majority of its members, and (2) these members often are uncertain about the implications and effects of the policy options from which they must choose. In addition to promoting the parochial interests of powerful constituencies à la distributive theory, Krehbiel reasoned, committees can influence legislative outcomes by using their specialized expertise to provide the full chamber with information about the consequences of policy alternatives. The committees of the House and Senate, then, are properly conceptualized as instruments of the legislature. And the composition of their memberships, the procedures that guide the consideration of committee bills on the floor, and the eventual fate of legislation, are all determined by the full chamber.

(p. 409) Krehbiel's *informational* model had a profound impact on legislative scholarship, in part because it generated a number of substantively interesting hypotheses that could be tested with available evidence. For example, if chambers rely on committees as a source of information, the panels that they construct should not be systematically tilted toward narrow interests or constituencies, and instead should be relatively representative of policy preferences in the chamber as a whole. In contrast to distributive theory, then, Krehbiel argued that committees should not be generally composed of “preference outliers.” Indeed, such “outlier” committees should only be tolerated if their expertise is so great that it countervails the disadvantages from their skewed policy preferences. According to distributive theory, the policy recommendations of outlier committees should receive significant procedural protections on the floor, such as restrictions on the amendments that other members can offer to committee bills, in order to ensure that the logroll between different interests will be maintained. The informational model, in contrast, predicts that all committees will not be granted the same procedural advantages in the full chamber. Instead, the higher the level of expertise within a committee, and the more representative it is of the chamber as a whole, the more likely that the full membership will be willing to protect the panel's handiwork on the floor. Krehbiel's informational theory, in other words, has implications for all major features of the committee process, from assignments and the distribution of preferences within panels, to the representativeness of committee bills and the procedures that affect the fate of these bills on the floor.

In the second half of *Information and Legislative Organization*, Krehbiel reported the results of a number of empirical tests that he claimed support the informational perspective and are inconsistent with the distributive model. His analysis of the committee outlier hypothesis has received the most attention from scholars. For indicators of "preferences," Krehbiel relied on the ratings of member roll-call votes devised by fourteen major interest groups. Two of the rating schemes tap liberal-conservative ideology, while the rest are more relevant to particular issue areas (e.g. American Security Council ratings for defense matters) and thus are potentially useful for jurisdiction-specific analysis. First, Krehbiel used the general indicators of member liberalism/conservatism to examine whether the mean and median values within standing committees diverged from the chamber mean and median during 1985–6.[4] Most committees, he found, did not have mean or median ideological scores that differed significantly from the full House. Next, he analyzed the relative representativeness of nine panels for which jurisdictionally relevant groups scores were available. The best evidence for outlier status was the House Armed Services Committee, which was significantly more pro-defense than the full chamber. Otherwise, there was little evidence that committees are high-demand preference outliers à la distributive theory. Certain panels, such as Education and Labor, had mean or median scores that diverged from the chamber statistic, but for the most part these differences (p. 410) were not statistically significant. In succeeding chapters, he also analyzed whether the full House or Senate provided committees with the parliamentary protections necessary for them to exert distributive power. Based on evidence about the content of House amendment rules and the use and makeup of conference committees, he concluded that there was little systematic evidence of such protections. Indeed, the use of restrictive amendment rules appeared to be negatively, rather than positively, associated with the distributive content of committee legislation.

In addition to the distributive and informational theories, legislative scholars advanced a third approach to explain congressional organization: the *partisan* perspective. Here, the majority party leadership (on behalf of the party rank and file) makes the important decisions about committee composition and structure. Of course, scholars had long argued that key institutional features of the House and Senate are influenced by party politics (see Smith 2007, for an overview). However, as the ideological differences between Democrats and Republicans increased on Capitol Hill during the 1980s and 1990s, scholarly interest in the influence of party grew substantially.

First, David Rohde (1991) devised the theory of "conditional party government," which maintains that power shifts from the committee rooms of Congress toward majority party leaders as policy preferences within each party become more homogeneous and the gulf between them widens.[5] Although Rohde's 1991 book includes an array of formal and informal tests of his theory, the most cited applications concern the transition to Republican rule following the 1994 mid-term elections and party management of committees during the years that followed. In collaboration with John Aldrich, Rohde argued that the high preference homogeneity of the new Republican majority led incoming Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., to reduce the power of committees and

committee chairs through rule changes and informal practices, such as adopting term limits for committee chairs and setting aside the seniority norm to personally pick committee chairs who were especially supportive of the GOP program. Indeed, many of the committee reforms implemented by the Republicans after the 1994 elections are mostly consistent with the conditional party government argument. Moreover, the House majority party's direct involvement during committee deliberations and its strategic management of committee bills on the floor stepped up markedly during the late 1990s, as predicted by the theory (Aldrich and Rohde 1997, 2000a, Sinclair 2007). The Republican leadership's remarkable influence over committee decision-making encompassed panels as jurisdictionally diverse as Appropriations (Aldrich and Rohde 2000a) and Agriculture (Hurwitz, Moiles, and Rohde, 2001). And, when the first wave of Republican committee chairs was replaced in 2000 because of the new term limits, party loyalty and fundraising prowess superseded seniority as the main criterion for choosing replacements (Deering and Wahlbeck 2006; Cann 2009).

(p. 411) In a series of studies, Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins formulated a related party theory, the cartel model (see especially 1993 and 2005).[6] Mostly compatible with the conditional party government approach, the cartel theory emphasizes that the name brands of the two political parties matter to voters, and, as a result, members of each party share a common electoral interest that leads them to grant to their leaders in Congress the prerogatives necessary to promote the party's agenda. In contrast to conditional party government, though, cartel theory holds that leadership power over the agenda has been a stable and long-standing feature of the House, rather than conditional on the distribution of preferences. In the first articulation of their theory, Cox and McCubbins (1993) conceptualized party power as both negative (blocking items from the agenda opposed by most majority party members) and positive (advancing through the chamber legislation endorsed by most majority party members), while their 2005 refinement of the theory mainly emphasizes negative power. But both articulations have implications for committee politics, and the evidence they marshal meshes well with the empirical studies of Aldrich and Rohde, Sinclair (1995), and other scholars of the congressional parties.

For one, Cox and McCubbins also evaluate and find wanting the standard distributive view that committees are distinct in their memberships and autonomous vis- à-vis the full House. They use committee assignment evidence to reassess Shepsle's finding that the assignment process is mostly one of self-selection. Over 40 percent of freshmen requests are denied, they note, which seems contrary to simple self- selection. Moreover, using a more extensive data set than Shepsle, they find that members with higher levels of party loyalty on roll calls are significantly more likely to receive a committee assignment transfer from the leadership than are less loyal lawmakers. Cox and McCubbins also waded into the committee outlier debate. For indicators of member preferences, they relied on interest group ratings, as well as the Poole–Rosenthal NOMINATE scores discussed elsewhere in this volume. Examining Congresses from 1947 to 1988, they find

most committees to be representative of the ideological and geographic makeup of the two party caucuses. But they did uncover more cases of biased panels than did Krehbiel.

To explain the variance, Cox and McCubbins developed an interesting typology of committees based on whether (a) the effects of a jurisdiction on committee non-members are uniform or targeted, and (b) the affected constituencies are homogeneous or heterogeneous in their interests. Committees that create fairly uniform external effects across members (e.g. Appropriations, Public Works) should have party contingents that are representative of the relevant party caucus. For these panels, they claimed, the consequences of committee action are of concern to the entire caucus, and the leadership will ensure that the party's contingent on the committee reflects this broader interest. Jurisdictions that have a more targeted, or lopsided, distribution of effects (e.g. Agriculture, Interior) are more likely to have (p. 412) party contingents that are unrepresentative of the relevant caucus in important ways. Here, the consequences for the party rank and file from an outlier committee are less significant because of the targeted impact of the jurisdiction. Committees that produce a mixture of uniform and targeted effects (e.g. Armed Services, Education and Labor) are less easy to predict. And within each category, the more homogeneous the interests of the affected clientele groups, the greater the likelihood of committee bias. Using NOMINATE scores and the various interest group ratings, Cox and McCubbins find that the uniform externality panels were mostly representative of the two party caucuses, while the targeted effects committees were the most likely to be unrepresentative. The mixed externality committees fell somewhere in the middle. And overall, homogeneity of interests in a committee's environment was associated with outlier status. As a result, the authors claimed that the jurisdictional characteristics of unrepresentative committees are consistent with party control over the assignment process.

As mentioned, Cox and McCubbins' (2005) refinement of cartel theory emphasized the negative agenda power of majority party leaders and, not surprisingly, most of the empirical tests in that study relate to floor decision-making. However, they do claim that when preferences within the majority party grow more heterogeneous, the role of agenda-setter becomes more decentralized within the majority party, with chairs using their own procedural powers to block divisive proposals in committee. Using data about the incidence of minority party dissents on committee reports and committee roll calls, they demonstrate that the majority party contingent in committee is seldom rolled on the motion to report.[7] Moreover, minority party members are far more likely to file dissents to committee reports, even controlling for ideology. Overall, then, the studies of Cox and McCubbins, Aldrich and Rohde, and other scholars have uncovered fairly compelling evidence for party effects within the committee rooms of Congress, thus challenging arguments that distributive or informational models alone are sufficient to understand committee politics in Congress.

Adjudicating between models

The competing models of congressional organization produced a flurry of empirical research by legislative scholars aimed at adjudicating between the models, and many of these studies dealt with committees. For one, there was a large quantity of research that attempted to sort out the divergent results about preference outliers. Literally dozens of published articles touched on the topic, but here are a few highlights.[8] Hall and Grofman (1990) questioned whether roll-call indicators could proxy for (p. 413) member preferences.[9] And even if the standard distributive story is accurate, they point out, because of cross-jurisdictional logrolling we would expect that committee proposals would be deferred to on the floor, and thus that the votes cast by panel members and non-members should be similar. Vote-based indicators of member preferences, in other words, cannot distinguish between competing models. Instead, Hall and Grofman maintain that relevant economic characteristics of a lawmaker's constituency can provide better measures. Using data about agriculture interests at the state level, they show that members of Senate panels with jurisdiction over agriculture tend to be more pro-farmer than the chamber as a whole. Adler and Lapinski (1997) and Adler (2000) likewise used economic, social and geographic characteristics of districts to test for committee outliers from 1943 to 1998, finding ample evidence of unrepresentative panels. Adler (2002) conducted a similar analysis with analogous results for Appropriations subcommittees. Groseclose (1994) questioned the statistical criteria used by Krehbiel and others to identify outlier panels. Relying on interest group ratings as preference indicators, he employed Monte Carlo techniques that avoided these methodological limitations and found little evidence in support of any of the competing theories. Groseclose concludes that it is difficult to find sufficient statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis that members are assigned randomly to committees.

Clearly, the matter of committee representativeness is controversial in the literature. Still, considering the full range of studies, a fair assessment would be that the identification of outliers becomes more likely when one shifts from broad ideological proxies like NOMINATE to more specialized interest group ratings to jurisdictionally relevant constituency characteristics. The more tailored the preference indicator is to the programs and issues that a panel considers, the more likely that it will produce evidence that a committee is biased. And such findings are especially associated with panels that have jurisdiction over programs with strong constituency linkages or that target benefits to a limited subset of districts or states. Committee representativeness of the full chamber or the two party caucuses, in other words, varies in predictable ways by jurisdiction.

The preference outlier debate is the most prominent example of committee research aimed at adjudicating between the competing theories, but other studies that appeared during the 1990s and since then also addressed whether features of committee politics resonate with these models. For example, King (1994, 1997) examined how the jurisdictions of committees change over time, as chairs seek to expand their turf into

neighboring policy areas. Mostly relying on evidence from the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, he found that formal rule changes are less important as a source of jurisdictional change than are informal adjustments resulting from the referral decisions of the parliamentarian. Moreover, the criteria used in making these (p. 414) decisions appear to reflect the informational needs of the floor median rather than the programmatic agenda of the majority party or some distributive coalition.

Along those lines, Cox and McCubbins (1993) claimed that decisions to create and destroy committees typically are made to enhance the interests of the majority party. Schickler and Rich (1997), however, identified every House rules change during 1919–93 that altered committee jurisdictional boundaries and found that only two of the twenty-six changes were made by party-line vote, suggesting that jurisdictions are not set to advantage the majority party relative to the minority. Similarly, Evans and Oleszek's (1997) analysis of House Republican efforts to realign jurisdictions after the 1994 mid-term elections indicates that the interests of powerful constituency groups and the personal power agendas of individual members mostly stymied efforts by Newt Gingrich and his colleagues to remake jurisdictions around the Republican agenda. Still other scholars, such as Baumgartner, Jones, and MacLeod (2000); Hardin (1998); Sheingate (2006); and Adler and Wilkerson (2008), find that rule changes can be a significant source of jurisdictional change, and that adjustments in committee turf tend to occur for myriad reasons.

Indeed, when the debate over congressional organization is considered in its entirety, the bottom line appears to be that no single theory or causal factor is adequate for understanding committees and their role. In a sense, momentum in the field is toward revisiting the central message and opening sentences of Fenno's (1973) classic volume: “This book rests on a single assumption and conveys a simple theme. The assumption is that congressional committees matter. The theme is that congressional committees differ [xiii].” In a careful study that incorporates extensive data about committee assignments, the content of amendment rules, and chamber support for committee proposals from the 1950s to the 1990s, Maltzman (1997) argues persuasively that committees are responsive to multiple “principals,” including outside constituencies, the party caucuses, and the full chamber, depending on the strength of the majority party and the salience of the relevant panel's agenda. As scholars continue to refine and test theoretical models of legislative institutions, like Fenno and Maltzman they need to focus on how committees differ from one another and over time.

They also should consider whether the motivational psychology of members might matter more than the institutional arrangements so central to the debate about legislative organization. Richard Hall's 1996 book, *Participation in Congress*, explores a critical feature of committee decision-making: the choices made by members about whether and how much to participate during committees' deliberations over legislation. Hall uses records of committee sessions to construct a bill-specific indicator of member participation that taps involvement in the drafting stage, attendance at markups, the casting of roll calls in committee, the offering of amendments during markups, and so on.

The documentary evidence is buttressed by more than 100 interviews with members and staff to three House committees: Agriculture, Education and Labor, and Energy and Commerce. Based on these interviews, he constructed indicators of the extent to which the dozens of bills for which he had participation data evoked the goals of individual committee members. Included among the (p. 415) motivational factors he tapped were the reelection, policy, and influence goals emphasized by Fenno, as well as promoting the agenda of the president.

Hall's book is chock full of insights, but especially important is his finding that on most bills, the goals of only a small subset of a committee's membership are evoked, and participation during committee deliberations is usually narrow. As a result, the distribution of NOMINATE scores or of constituency characteristics within a panel may not tell us very much about the content of a bill because only a small subset of the relevant committee is actually paying attention and participating. Most often, the active subset includes committee leaders and members of the relevant subcommittee. In Hall's view, participation at the committee stage captures the “revealed intensity” of member preferences, and intensities can matter more than direction. He finds that the biases introduced into decision-making by selective participation vary by bill and the mix of goals that are evoked. For constituency-oriented legislation, such as the items considered by the Agriculture Committee, the subset of participants hails from districts that are far more dependent on the farm economy than is typical for other members. For bills and issues that engage other goals, such as making good policy, the biases that occur because of selective participation are less pronounced. The gist of Hall's study, however, is *not* that committees are or are not composed of “preference outliers,” but that the conceptual debate about legislative organization may not have been asking the right questions. The division of labor that exists within Congress is not wholly a structural manifestation based on jurisdictional boundaries, committee assignments, and procedural protections on the floor. Rather, in Hall's words, it “bubbles up from the day-to-day decisions of individual members as they decide how to best allocate the time, energy, and other resources of their enterprise on the numerous issues that arise within and beyond the panels to which they are assigned” (1996, 239). Perhaps scholars should focus less on institutional features of the committee system and more on the calculations of individual lawmakers about when and how to involve themselves in the legislative process.

Future research

Since the 1960s, the scholarly literature about Congress and its committees has been transformed from the rich descriptive treatments of Fenno, Jones, and their contemporaries, to the more rigorous, model-driven, research that characterizes ongoing debates about the foundations of legislative organization. Over time, the substantive focus has shifted from describing and comparing the internal operations of individual panels to testing hypotheses about the relative importance of distributive coalitions, party

pressures, and the informational needs of the full chamber for understanding general features of the committee system. Conceptually, congressional scholars have mostly discarded elements of sociological theories, such as “integration” and member (p. 416) “roles,” and turned instead to the more individualistic, purposive approach of rational choice theory, especially the spatial model of legislative choice. Empirically, they have reduced their reliance on interviews, the personal observation of legislators at work, and case analysis, and made greater use of systematic quantitative data, especially vote-based measures of member preferences. Most important, the study of how committees operate internally and how they differ from one another is no longer at the center of legislative studies as a sub-field. Instead, features of the committee system serve as test implications for gaging the explanatory power of general theories of legislative organization. Congressional research is no longer committee-centric and the focus is more on floor politics and the role of parties. By any measure, this scholarly transformation is remarkable.

In part, the transformation of committee scholarship reflects conceptual changes within the discipline of political science, especially the emergence of rational choice theory as the leading intellectual paradigm for studying American political institutions. But the transformation also reflects real substantive changes that have occurred in Washington politics, such as the demise of the Conservative Coalition and the concomitant rise of member individualism and party polarization. Indeed, the post- 1960s changes that have taken place in congressional politics, including the role of committees, have made the institution especially conducive to applications of rational choice theory, which is one reason why congressional scholars have been at the vanguard of the rational choice project within political science. The transformation has also produced an enormous amount of new knowledge about congressional procedure; the basic structure of the roll-call record; the ideological representativeness of committees vis-à-vis the full chamber; the determinants of special rules and other procedural protections for committee bills; and so on. Still, viewing the literature from the perspective of this longer-term transformation provides considerable guidance about trajectories for future research about congressional committees.

One byproduct of the field's current fascination with floor roll calls and party influence is a paucity of research about other significant topics of traditional interest to congressional scholars. Even in an era of polarized parties and strong party leaders, most legislative decisions still are made within the committee rooms of Congress. Perhaps the best evidence of the enduring importance of committees is simply the disproportionate attention that interest groups and lobbyists continue to allocate to members of the panels with jurisdiction over their programs. Group leaders, whose professional livelihoods depend on their personal understanding of who actually matters on Capitol Hill, continue to pour campaign donations and the lion's share of their lobbying efforts on members of the House and Senate panels that consider their issues.

Yet, since the appearance of *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle* in 1978, no study of the committee assignment process has been conducted that is as comprehensive, theoretically grounded, and methodologically sophisticated as Shepsle's landmark work. This is particularly unfortunate because Frisch and Kelly (2006) have amassed an enormous amount of new data and fascinating descriptive evidence about the committee assignment process. Thanks to their efforts, we now have assignment request data from 1947 to 1994 for House Democrats (except for 1957–8) and for House (p. 417) Republicans from 1950 to 1992. The personal papers of recent congressional leaders include records of committee assignment requests into the late 1990s and 2000s. And the papers of former Senate leaders, archived in libraries around the country, include analogous, although less comprehensive, evidence about committee assignment requests for that chamber. Bullock's (1985) finding about the limited impact of constituency characteristics on Senate assignment requests is an intriguing signal of the significant bicameral differences that scholars might uncover in the assignment process. Moreover, the methodological techniques available for analyzing these data also have advanced in important ways since Shepsle conducted his research. There is a significant opportunity for further research on the committee assignment process in both chambers and over time that builds on Shepsle's theoretical and empirical accomplishments.

Another research opportunity relates to the study of member participation in committee. Hall aside, this topic is also of long-standing interest to congressional scholars because it informs so many questions about influence and policymaking. Indeed, “participation-specialization” was one of the three main features of committee decision-making analyzed in Fenno (1973), and Manley (1970) cited participation data culled from private transcripts of executive sessions dealing with Medicare and excise tax reduction in 1965. Unfortunately, the committee scholars of the 1960s lacked systematic access to data about what transpired during formal markup sessions, which for the most part were closed to the public. The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, however, stipulated for the first time that committees must make certain markup records publicly accessible. As a result, Hall was able to review verbatim transcripts of committee markups during the 1980s to construct the central dependent variable in his research about participation in committee. Such participation, we have seen, is critical for understanding the content of committee bills and has implications for theories of congressional organization. Yet, Hall's book mostly focuses on participation data from just three committees for a single Congress.[10] There is analogous evidence available for most other panels in the relevant committee offices in both the House and Senate. Gamble (2007) employed such data from the committees on Education and Labor, Financial Services, and Judiciary for 2001–2 to analyze the relative participation of African-American and Caucasian lawmakers, finding that black members participated more extensively than their white counterparts on bills that touched on black interests and on non-racial matters as well. Evans (1991a) is a study of member participation in three Senate committees during 1985–6. He shows that committee participation is also selective in that chamber, and that subcommittee positions in the Senate are strongly associated with legislative activism. But other than

these two studies, no scholar has built on Hall's pathbreaking research about committee participation and the consequences for representation, or otherwise exploited the extensive documentary record now available for committee markup sessions.

(p. 418) Still another opening for additional committee research concerns the roll-call votes that members cast during markup sessions. These data also were made generally available for the first time by the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, and two books about voting in committee quickly appeared, mostly exploring the factions and voting blocs that surfaced in House committees during the 1970s (Parker and Parker 1985; Unekis and Rieselbach 1984). Similar records of roll calls cast in committee in both the House and Senate are now available in the relevant committee rooms for most panels and for more recent Congresses. Given the importance of the committee stage and the huge quantity of scholarly effort that has been allocated to scaling and analyzing the floor roll-call record, it is surprising that voting in committee has received so little scholarly attention. Indeed, recent advances in roll-call analysis using Bayesian and other techniques are particularly appropriate for analyzing votes taken in small legislatures such as committees (e.g. Peress 2009).

Like participation data, committee roll calls are potentially important for conceptual reasons. As mentioned, Cox and McCubbins (2005) use the committee votes gathered two decades ago by Parker and Parker (1985) to show that the majority party is seldom rolled in committee on motions to report, which suggests that the majority contingent exerts a degree of agenda control in committee. Along those lines, the conditional party government argument implies that party leaders influence outcomes in part by convincing members to evaluate issues on the floor in ideological, left–right terms, rather than along alternative dimensions that may tap the more parochial interests of their constituents. If leaders indeed shape the decision-making process, one indicator might be reduced roll-call dimensionality as bills move from committee to the floor to final passage. In addition, Krehbiel (1998) used repeated votes on the same questions to conduct “switcher analyses” aimed at discovering which members are subject to lobbying by party leaders and other actors seeking to influence the legislative process. The questions subject to roll calls in committee often are also the subject of votes on the floor, enabling scholars to use inconsistencies in member positions across the two stages to shed light on the dynamics of coalition building.

There is also potential for theoretically informed scholarship about legislative leadership, using committees as a laboratory and important source of contextual variation. Over the past two decades, ample research has been conducted on the role of party leaders in Congress (see Sinclair 1995 for an overview and example). But there are significant conceptual and empirical advantages to studying leadership within committees. For one, the leading theories emphasize that leadership styles and behavior are highly responsive to the decision-making context, especially the distribution of preferences among the relevant rank and file, and the availability of formal prerogatives such control over the agenda (Cooper and Brady 1981; Rohde 1991; Cox and McCubbins 2005). At any point in time, however, there is only one House Speaker and only one Senate majority leader,

complicating efforts at generalization. The committee rooms of Congress, in contrast, feature dozens of chairs and ranking minority members operating within strikingly different contexts.

It is well established that the distribution of preferences on highly partisan panels such as the Ways and Means Committee differs substantially from the leadership (p. 419) contexts on more distributive committees such as Transportation and Infrastructure, and chairs should operate very differently across the two panels. Manley's (1970) description of the leadership of Wilbur Mills is a staple of the literature, and Fenno (1973) contrasted the styles of the chairs on his sample of committees. Strahan (1990) is a study of committee leadership on Ways and Means during the chairmanship of Dan Rostenkowski, D-Ill., in the 1980s. And Evans (1991b) compared the strategies and tactics employed by full committee leaders on four Senate panels during the 1980s, emphasizing the importance of the distribution of preferences and the internal structure of the committees for understanding important features of leadership behavior. However, as congressional scholarship turned away from the internal operations of committees and the important differences that exist between them, the analysis of leadership in committee has all but atrophied. As a result, there are significant opportunities to use the chairs and ranking minority members of current committees to shed important new light on the nature of legislative leadership.

A renewed scholarly emphasis on committees would also help address major conceptual and empirical difficulties in the controversy over legislative organization. For one, the different theories appear to be somewhat jurisdiction-specific in their explanatory power. Partisan theories seem especially appropriate for understanding member decision-making within jurisdictions that divide Democrats from Republicans, while the distributive perspective is particularly useful for understanding policies and programs that target particularistic benefits to specific geographic areas. If member decision-making—and the way that congressional structures shape decision-making—indeed varies in systematic ways by issue area, then careful analysis of how and why congressional committees differ from each other should inform scholarship about the domains in which the different theories are likely to be relevant.

In addition, a number of scholars (e.g. Katznelson and Lapinski 2006) have called for increased attention to policy and the content of legislation. The quality of representation, these scholars observe, can only be fully assessed by relating the substance of legislative outcomes to the preferences and interests of constituents. Committees are a useful vehicle for analyzing the determinants of legislative outcomes because most policy decisions occur during that stage of the legislative process, and because committee jurisdictions differ substantially in the types of policies that they contain. Indeed, the committee studies of the 1960s and 1970s typically addressed the linkages between member goals, committee structure, and the content of committee bills (e.g. Price 1972; Fenno 1973, ch. 7). Yet, recent empirical tests of the competing theories of legislative organization focus almost exclusively on behavior rather than policy, even though the most substantively consequential test implications of these theories concern the content

of legislation. The main reason is the lack of systematic data about the relationship between member preferences and policy outcomes across a diversity of issue areas. Gathering such evidence should be more straightforward the narrower the policy domain. Thus, a focus on committees as arenas for policymaking could facilitate efforts to incorporate policy content into empirical studies of Congress.

Finally, stepped-up research about decision-making in committee would help scholars understand the process through which the policy preferences of legislators (p. 420) are formed, which is a critical conceptual and empirical gap in recent research about Congress. Four decades of descriptive research indicates that the preferences that individual lawmakers develop between competing legislative alternatives are endogenous to the lawmaking process. Certainly members have core beliefs about what constitutes good public policy, and they are loath to take positions that are inconsistent with their prior records. But as Krehbiel (1991), Arnold (1990), and other scholars emphasize, there is considerable uncertainty about the relationship that exists between policy alternatives (the legislative options on the table) and policy outcomes (the impact of these options on people's lives). As a result, members may have clear views about the ultimate impact that they seek, but still lack fully developed preferences over alternatives. Indeed, member viewpoints about legislative options are best conceptualized as *induced* preferences. As major decisions loom, they face some mix of alternatives over which the constituencies they care about (clientele groups, party leaders, and so on) may have divergent priorities and views. Members form their preferences by weighing and balancing these competing preferences emanating from the decision-making environment. It simply is not feasible to evaluate the relative importance of distributive coalitions, party pressures, or the informational needs of the full chamber, without considering the impact of these and other factors on the process through which lawmakers form preferences and make up their minds. This is why prominent scholars of American institutions, such as Smith (2007) and Fiorina (2009), maintain that spatial theories need to be refined by unpacking the concept of member preferences, which in these models typically are treated as fixed and exogenous.[11]

Committees are a great vehicle for studying preference formation. Undecided legislators on the floor often look to members of the committee of jurisdiction for cues in making up their minds about how to vote. The positions and preferences of these committee members, in turn, are generally formed during the committee stage of the process. As a result, efforts to extend leading spatial theories of congressional organization to better incorporate the process of preference formation—a critical next conceptual step, many scholars believe—would be informed by more systematic research about coalition building and decision-making within the committee rooms of Congress.

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Notes:

(1) These scholars in turn emphasized their own intellectual debt to Huitt's (1954) case study of the House Banking Committee. See also Matthews (1960), especially ch. 7.

(2) Other important committee-related scholarship conducted during the 1960s includes Peabody (1963), Robinson (1963), Goodwin (1970), and Murphy (1969, 1974).

(3) Ray (1980, 1982) also produced several noteworthy studies of the committee assignment process around the time that *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle* appeared.

(4) In a related article, Krehbiel (1990) incorporated interest group ratings from 1979 to 1986, including ratings for both the House and Senate, producing results analogous to those summarized here.

(5) Although mostly focused on the emergence of strong party leadership over time, Sinclair (1995) applies a “principal-agent” framework to party–committee relations that mostly jibes with conditional party government.

(6) Aspects of the cartel theory were also apparent in Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991), which in contrast to Fenno's research argued that the Appropriations Committees are best viewed as agents of the congressional parties.

(7) A majority party “roll” in committee occurs when the position taken by most majority party members within the panel on a motion to report legislation to the floor does not prevail.

(8) In the addition to the studies cited in the text, other noteworthy articles that address the committee outlier hypothesis include: Frisch and Kelly (2004); Krehbiel (1994); Londregan and Snyder (1994); Maltzman and Smith (1994); Overby and Kazee (2000); Parker, Copa, et al. (2004); Sprague (2008); and Young and Heitshusen (2003).

(9) Like Cox and McCubbins (1993), Hall and Grofman (1990) also argued that committee bias should be conditional, and more likely when the policies considered by a panel affect a relatively small portion of the membership.

(10) Hall also considered participation data for a sample of legislation from 1993–4, as well as selected evidence for an earlier Congress and for the Senate, but most of his analysis derives from evidence from just three House panels during a single Congress in the early 1980s.

(11) Obviously, Krehbiel (1991) is an exception and provides useful guidance about how preference formation can be integrated into spatial models of legislatures.

C. Lawrence Evans

Government, College of William and Mary

C. Lawrence Evans is Newton Family Professor of Government at the College of William and Mary.