Procedural Contexts, Party Strategy, and Conditional Party Voting in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1971–2000

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In this article, we provide a critical review of the evidence and arguments about party polarization in the House of Representatives during the late 20th century. We show that inferences about party polarization are significantly affected by voting reform in the early 1970s. We observe that a decomposed roll-call record alters our view of the timing of changes in party polarization and therefore requires that we reconsider explanations of the trend. We revisit explanations of party polarization and establish a strong case for placing substantial emphasis on party strategies in explanations of party polarization in floor behavior during the 1980s and 1990s.

No feature of congressional politics during the past three decades has received more notice than the increase in partisanship. While journalistic accounts frequently note the sharpness of partisan rhetoric, scholars have noted the increase in the frequency of party votes since 1970 (Bond and Fleisher 2000, 3; Davidson and Oleszek 2002, 286; also see Figure 2), and the nearly monotonic increase in the difference in mean and median ideology scores between House Democrats and Republicans (Jacobson 2000, 13). The polarization of congressional parties has motivated important theory about the dynamics of party leadership and party influence (Gamm and Smith 2001; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1983, 1995) and served as the foundation of a spirited debate about the existence of party effects in legislative voting (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Krehbiel 1993; Snyder and Groseclose 2000; Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith 1999).

In this article, we provide a critical review of the evidence and arguments about party polarization in the House of Representatives during the late twentieth century. First, we review the three major explanations for congressional party polarization—changing electoral coalitions, changing policy agenda, and changing party strategy. Second, we show that inferences about party polarization are affected by voting reform in the early 1970s. We observe that the frequency of party voting is conditional on the procedural context. In fact, a decomposed roll-call record alters our view of the timing of changes in party polarization, which, in turn, influences how we evaluate explanations of the trend. Finally, we show that the evidence supports all three explanations for polarization, although important qualifications are required. In light of the emphasis placed on changing electoral coalitions, the most notable finding is the importance of party strategies for polarization in floor voting.

Explanations of Polarization

Political science has no shortage of explanations for party polarization in the late twentieth century. The explanations rely on a variety of trends, some of which exhibit quite different timing. In this section, we review the explanations that have been offered and evaluate evidence from the roll-call record, taking into account the nature of the votes that exhibit increased partisanship. Several

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theories and considerable speculation have been offered to explain the trend in party polarization since 1970. Three related processes have been noted: changes in electoral coalitions and legislative policy preferences, changes in the national policy agenda, and party strategies. The electoral-preferences account is the most thoroughly studied and strongly emphasized, but the policy agenda and party strategies have been noted as well (Sinclair 1983; Connelly and Pitney 1994).

Polarizing Electoral Coalitions

The best developed explanation, and the one most strongly situated in theory about congressional parties, holds that the change in electoral coalitions has induced greater polarization in legislative parties' policy preferences. The argument has southern and nonsouthern elements. Realignment of the South altered the electoral alignments within states and districts and changed composition of the congressional parties (Jacobson 2000; Rohde 1992). Rohde (1992) argues that many southern Democrats found their constituencies more liberal as a by-product of voting-rights legislation and the mobilization of black voters. Districts and states were affected to varying degrees, leaving many quite conservative and ripe for Republican candidates. Republicans comprised less than 10% of southern representatives until the 1960s, but increased their southern representation to over 20% by the 1970s and reached over 30% in the 1980 elections, about where they remained until after 1990 (Connelly and Pitney 1994, 21). By the 1990s, Republicans held more than half of southern districts. Southern Republicans replaced conservative Democrats, leaving House Democrats more liberal on the whole and reinforcing the conservatism of House Republicans. The addition of more House seats to Sunbelt states in successive reapportionments since the 1960s further contributed to the number of southern Republicans elected.

Even outside the South, polarization of the parties' electoral bases may have contributed to legislative polarization. The electoral coalitions supporting the two parties became more polarized in demographic characteristics (Brewer, Mariani, and Stonecash 2002) and policy attitudes (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 1997; Jacobson 2000). Issue polarization appears to have increased in the 1970s, exhibited little net change in the 1980s, and increased again in the 1990s (Jacobson 2000, 18). The literature is not clear about the mechanisms at work but two are possible. The first is a sorting of districts and legislators so that, through turnover, new Democrats came from more liberal districts and new Republicans came from more conservative districts. The second is a polarization of opinion within the districts of incumbent legislators, with Democratic districts becoming more liberal and Republican districts becoming more conservative, encouraging legislators to move to less moderate policy positions.

An important caveat about the electoral foundations of congressional polarization is Jacobson's observation that the largest expansion of party polarization of the electorate's policy attitudes, which occurred in the 1990s, *follows* congressional polarization (Jacobson 2000). Jacobson argues that congressional candidates who were taking more polarized policy positions may have led the electorate to more polarized policy views. Thus, voters responded to parties with more distinct policies and images.

Agenda Change

Change in the nature of the issues Congress confronts, which is at least partly out of the control of its members and parties, may alter voting alignments even if legislators' preferences over old issues did not change. Budget deficits, particularly in the period between the late 1970s and mid-1990s, are said to have focused congressional attention on the size and role of the federal government, an issue that is the core of longstanding party differences. In turn, budgeting contributed to more frequent use of omnibus measures that force votes on policy at a highly aggregated level and placed severe constraints on new policy initiatives (Deering and Smith 1997, 183–202; Krutz 2001, 79–81; Sinclair 1995, 48–51). These developments often forced legislative negotiations up to the level of party leaders and away from committee members and reduced opportunities for freelance bill and amendment sponsorship. While the agenda change thesis is difficult to confirm or refute, our observation that the two parties became more polarized at different times, Democrats in the mid to late 1980s, Republican in the early 1990s, is inconsistent with the argument that a change in the overall agenda led to polarization (see Figures 4 and 5). If agenda change is the primary determinant of polarization, we should expect to see it occur simultaneously in the two parties.

Party Strategies

A third argument is that the congressional parties' strategies generated more polarized voting divisions. The argument has been given little systematic attention by political scientists, although it the argument is implicit in Sinclair (1983, 1995), Smith (1989), and Rohde (1991), who contend that the leadership of House Democrats contributed to the cohesiveness of the party. Sinclair (1983), for example, argues that majority party leaders used a

strategy of inclusion and structured floor choices in a way that served the twin goals of keeping peace in the family and passing legislation. Positive inducements (committee assignments and other considerations) and careful use of special rules to structure floor choices encouraged greater loyalty than what preferences alone might have produced. Moreover, particular events, such as the response of the party to Phil Gramm's (D-TX, later R-TX) leadership on budget and tax cuts in 1981, led the Democrats to increase the credibility of threats of retribution for disloyal behavior. These developments are associated with the speakership of Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill (D-MA) and should have increased Democratic cohesiveness on the floor.

On the Republican side, a change in floor behavior may be associated with the implementation of party strategy attributed to Newt Gingrich (R-GA) and the Conservative Opportunity Society, known as the COS (Connelly and Pitney 1994). The COS was established in 1983 under the leadership of Gingrich, Robert Walker (R-PA), Vin Weber (R-MN), and others. The COS leadership insisted that their party stop working with majority Democrats to make small contributions to policy and instead should oppose the Democrats at every step in the legislative process, avoid accommodation, draw clear ideological distinctions between the parties, and go on the attack with national themes in more aggressive attempts to unseat Democratic incumbents. Vote no and sharpen the criticism was the theme—a "rule or ruin" strategy, it was dubbed by one House Republican.

Interparty tensions increased sharply after Jim Wright (D-TX) replaced O'Neill as Speaker in January 1987. Wright's full exploitation of the powers of the speakership deeply frustrated Republicans, whose numbers had not recovered from their losses in the 1982 elections. President Reagan's willingness to compromise with congressional Democrats left House Republicans without a significant policy role, which served to fuel COS complaints that the Republicans—in particular, Minority Leader Robert Michel (R-IL)—were not doing enough to distinguish themselves from the Democrats. Michel's response was that, "I am personally uncomfortable being a perpetual antagonist or having to get on the floor every day bitching and griping about being run over by the majority. I think there are more important things to be done." Nevertheless, Michel warned that unless Wright became more accommodating, the partisanship and floor flights would continue to escalate (Pianin 1987).

The partisanship continued, as did the debate over strategy within Republican ranks. Gingrich's view appeared to win out, eventually leading to his election as party whip in 1989. His election was accompanied by comments from many Republicans, including moderate Republicans such as Olympia Snowe (R-ME), that the party's strategies needed to be changed. By 1991, his ally Weber could observe, and probably with little dissent, "Newt is the most skillful practitioner of the politics of polarization I know." Republicans did not have a coherent, consistent strategy in the late 1980s, but many of them chose to follow Gingrich's lead in pursuing more confrontational, guerilla tactics (Osterlund 1991).[1]

Hypotheses

Three testable hypotheses follow from these arguments.

> *H1: The Southern Hypothesis. The replacement of southern Democrats with southern Republicans increased party polarization.*
>
> *H2: The New Breed Hypothesis. The replacement of retiring and defeated legislators by new legislators increased party polarization.*
>
> *H3: The Party Strategy Hypothesis. Moderate Democrats and Republicans, whether continuing or new legislators, exhibited disproportionately large increases in party unity, increasing party polarization.*

The three hypotheses require that we examine both the timing of party polarization and the identity of the legislators whose votes contributed to higher levels of party voting. We do this in two stages. First, we ask what effect the reform of House voting procedures has on our inferences about the timing of party polarization. That is, did the data upon which polarization measures are calculated change in a manner that affected the measures? We find that reform had an effect on inferences drawn about party polarization, that polarization occurred in very limited periods during the last generation, and that the behavioral changes in the two parties that produced polarization were timed differently. Second, for the specific periods of change in each party, we determine whether

[1]More background: By mid-1987, Gingrich was fully committed to his investigation of Speaker Wright's book contract and, later, Wright's financial arrangements on a condo in Texas. The full-fledged ethics investigation started in 1988 and ended with the resignation of Speaker Wright in June 1989. Although the COS point of view seemed to be gaining popularity in 1989, Michel-Gingrich differences were widely discussed in the contest for Republican whip in 1989, when Gingrich defeated Michel's close associate, Edward Madigan (R-IL), by two votes. Republican factionalism was exposed again in 1990, when incumbent conference chairman, Jerry Lewis (R-CA), defeated Gingrich's choice, Carl Purcell (R-MI), but Gingrich and his supporters proved quite willing to buck Michel and President George Bush on important issues.

the patterns of behavior across legislators comport with the three hypotheses. We find evidence that supports all three hypotheses but that also requires that the hypotheses be qualified in important ways. Perhaps most notable, we find heretofore uncovered evidence for the importance of party strategies in the polarization of the parties.

The Changing Roll-Call Record

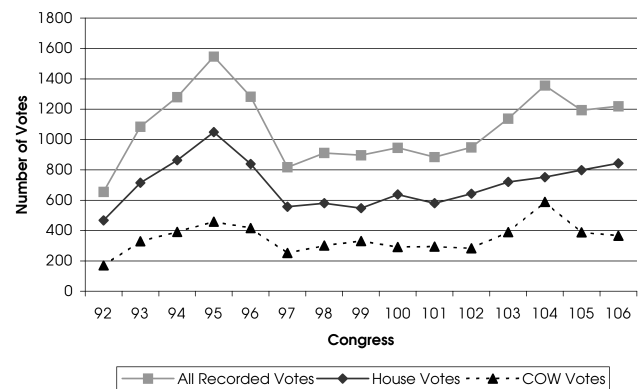
Scholars seeking to explain the rise of party polarization in Congress have pointed to the early 1970s as the starting point for the recent rise. While the literature has focused on behavioral explanations for the changes, little attention has been given to institutional features that could have precipitated this pattern. Both traditional party measures, such as the frequency of party votes, and dimensional analyses of voting, such as D-NOMINATE and its variations (Poole and Rosenthal 1997), are generally calculated over all roll-call votes for a given Congress.[2] This strategy is reasonable. It takes advantage of all available data and provides a basis for comparing voting patterns, both aggregate and individual, over time. Sophisticated scholars realize that changing preferences and issue agendas influence these aggregate measures of behavior. Yet, we political scientists seldom, if ever, worry that the roll-call record may change in other ways that may influence the inferences we draw about congressional behavior. House voting reforms in the early 1970s created one such possibility.

The Implications of Voting Reform

The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 provided for recorded-teller voting in the Committee of the Whole (COW). Until then, recorded roll-call votes occurred only in the House but not when the House convened as the COW. Implemented in 1971 at the start of the 92nd Congress, the rule provided that twenty members could demand a recorded vote, which was conducted by having members sign green or red cards (yea or nay) and deposit them in a box for appointed tellers to count. Clerks would later record the members voting yea and nay for printing in the House *Journal* and the *Congressional Record*. Recorded tellers in 1971 and 1972 replaced nearly all voting by unrecorded tellers, but produced only a modest increase in the number of amendments. In 1973 (the 93rd Congress), the House went a step further by instituting the current system of electronic voting for recorded votes in the COW and in the House.

[2]NOMINATE scores are based on all votes that have at least 5% disagreement.

FIGURE 1 Composition of the Roll Call Record



As Figure 1 reveals, an avalanche of recorded votes on amendments followed the adoption of electronic voting in January 1973. It appears that the ease of voting electronically, perhaps combined with the possibility of putting oneself and others on the record, generated a sharp increase in the number of amendments offered in the COW. Minority-party Republicans were responsible for a disproportionate share of the increase in amending activity, much of which was repetitive and deliberately designed to force Democrats to cast embarrassing votes, a pattern duly observed by Democrats who in 1979 sponsored the increase in the number of members required to request a recorded vote in the COW to 25 (Smith 1989, 28–36). Soon thereafter, Democrats began to employ special rules in creative ways to restrict amendments (Sinclair 1983; Bach and Smith 1988).

As Smith (1989) shows, the composition of the roll-call vote record changed nearly instantly with recorded, electronic voting. During the five pre-1971 Congresses, amendments constituted only 10.3 percent of all recorded votes on average. During the first five post-reform Congresses, amendments averaged 34.0 percent of all recorded votes. Over 90% of the amendment votes were cast in the COW. If the same combination of strategies and preferences shape all roll-call voting decisions then an increase in the number of recorded votes would only serve to improve our ability to correctly discern patterns from the data. However, if different types of votes generate different patterns in voting, a change in the composition of the roll-call record could significantly change the inferences we draw from it. Unfortunately, in the three decades that have passed since the voting reforms were adopted, we have not yet systematically explored the possibility that the addition of roll-call votes associated with amending activity to the record of roll-call voting altered the relationship between party and voting behavior as captured

in aggregate measures that now include both COW and House votes.

There are good theoretical reasons to expect party and voting to have a special relationship for amendments. Two possibilities deserve attention. First, from the perspective of spatial theories of legislative voting, in which preferences are assumed to be the exclusive motivation for legislators' voting behavior, the distribution of preferences dictates the degree to which party labels are associated with voting behavior. As a general rule, if party structures final passage or other forms of voting, party also should structure amendment voting. An increase in the proportion of all votes that are amendment votes may not produce any change in the overall relative frequency of party voting. However, if partisan alignments in preferences are more strongly associated with amendment votes than other types of votes, perhaps because of systematic differences in the vote choices, then we would expect that to be reflected in aggregate voting measures.

Amendment votes may differ systematically from other types of votes in the nature of the vote choices legislators confront. Final passage votes, conference report votes, and veto override votes come very close to pitting a policy alternative against the status quo. Legislators, if voting sincerely, choose the status quo or the bill; whichever is closest to their ideal points, where the bill already has been considered for amendment (if any were allowed). The location of the bill and the status quo determine the voting alignments. The status quo may be distant from most members of both parties, relative to the bill, generating bipartisan majorities even when party structures preferences. In the language of spatial voting, most legislators fall on the same side of the cutpoint. Many "must-pass" measures, such as budget and appropriations measures, appear to fall into this category as the status quo is unacceptable to all members. Thus, the relationship between party and voting can be weak even when preferences are ordered by party.

Amendments force a choice between a bill and an alternative or perhaps between two alternatives to a bill. Amendment sponsors are usually free to manipulate the content of their amendments, and therefore the policy location of the amendments, so as to gain a majority while minimizing policy concessions. Amendments, of course, are seldom "must pass" matters, even when offered to must-pass bills. The general tendency, then, is for amendment votes to be divisive. Thus, we would expect amendment voting to reflect divisions over the content of the legislation even when the legislation, however amended, is much preferred over the status quo by most legislators. Therefore, when preferences show a partisan alignment, that alignment is likely to be observed in amendment voting.

From an electoral perspective, amendments are ideal tools for legislators seeking to score political points at home or against the opposition—they are tools for staking positions and forcing others to take positions (Mayhew 1974). For a legislator seeking to insulate himself against criticism for voting against a bill, an amendment, even if it fails, provides a credible basis for defining what the legislator would have supported on final passage. A legislator, faction, or party seeking to force the opposition to cast embarrassing votes may find amendments are a flexible tool for doing so. Winning and losing is not the issue. The purpose is to put oneself or others on the record in order to claim credit, avoid blame, or cast aspersion on the intentions of others. While bills themselves may not necessarily be pursued for purely partisan electoral purposes, amendments are readily available to the rank-and-file legislator. Consequently, amendments, more frequently than bills, are likely to yield divisions orchestrated for partisan political purposes.[3]

Only one political science study explicitly addresses the relationship between party and voting at different stages of the legislative process. Froman and Ripley (1965) argue that committed leaders, procedural issues, low salient issues, low visibility actions, weak constituency pressures, and supportive state delegations are conditions conducive to party leadership influence. For our purposes, their analysis suggests that increasing the visibility of COW voting (from virtually no visibility to some visibility) would reduce party influence on COW voting. Moreover, Froman and Ripley find somewhat greater party unity among Democrats on final passage votes than on amendment votes in 1961–1963. Of course, their analysis could not include amendment voting in the COW, but they do argue that the pattern is consistent with their expectation that narrower issues (amendments) generate less party cohesiveness than broader measures (bills). We proceed to test the expectations of Froman and Ripley in the modern period.

Traditional Measures of Party Structure in Voting

Scholars have typically used three related aggregate measures to assess the degree of party-ness in roll-call voting—the relative frequency of party votes, party differences, and

[3]The differences in context and strategy on votes taken in the COW versus those taken in the House become clearer if we look at the rate of passage in the two contexts. For this time period (1971–2000), 86% of measures brought to a vote passed in the House, whereas only 40% succeeded in the COW.

party cohesion. The relative frequency of party votes, often just called party voting, is typically calculated as the percentage of votes on which a majority of one party voted yea and a majority of the other party voted nay. Such votes are regularly calculated by *Congressional Quarterly* for the modern Congress and have been calculated for the post–Civil War period by scholars. Party difference is the mean absolute value of the difference between the percentage of Democrats voting yea and the percentage of Republicans voting yea. Party cohesion is calculated for each party as the mean absolute value of difference between the percentage voting yea and the percentage voting nay, Party support, which is calculated for the individual legislator and sometimes called the party-unity score, is the percentage of votes on which a legislator votes the same as his party's majority. Party cohesion and party unity are usually based on party votes, and we follow that practice here.

Figures 2–5 show the time series for the three party measures for three sets of votes for the post-reform Congress—COW votes (amendments), House votes, and all votes. Figure 2 reveals that the addition of COW votes had a substantial effect on the frequency of party votes. As we expected, but contrary to the prediction of Froman and Ripley, opposing party majorities are much more common in amendment voting than in all other voting. During the 1970s and early 1980s, party voting runs between 60 and 70% for COW votes but remains between 20 and 35% for House votes. Plainly, the addition of the COW votes to the voting record instantly increased the sheer number and proportion of party votes.

The inclusion of COW votes significantly alters our view of the historical pattern of party voting. COW votes are responsible for most of the modest net increase in party voting during the 1970s and early 1980s. While counterfactuals are not always strong inferential tools, the data in Figure 2 suggest that without the inclusion

FIGURE 2 Percent Party Votes by Vote Type

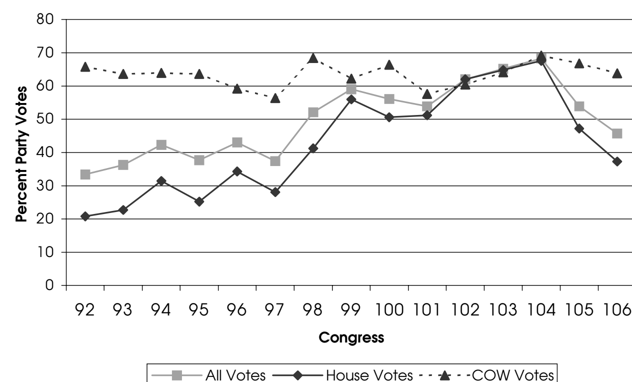
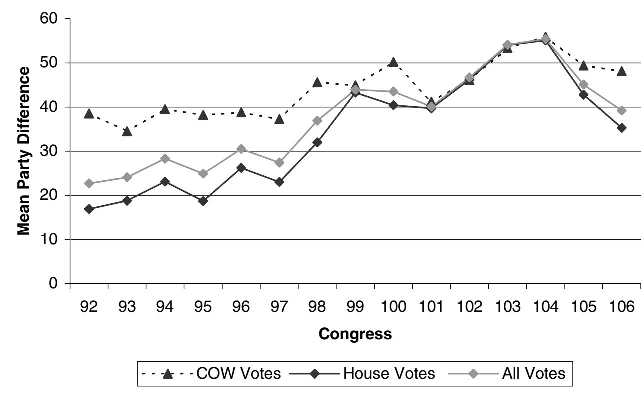


FIGURE 3 Mean Party Difference by Vote Type



of COW votes, party voting is likely to have shown little upward trend until the late 1980s. In the late 1980s, we would have noted an extraordinarily sharp increase in party voting in the 99thCongress (1985–1986).[4] That would place the most significant intensification of "partisanship" in the second Reagan term rather than in the Ford, Carter, or first Reagan terms.

The either-or character of the party voting criterion makes for a blunt measure that fails to capture the sharpness of division between the two parties so scholars often prefer to examine party differences in percent voting yea. Figure 3 demonstrates that party differences were much larger for COW votes than House votes in the 1970s and early 1980s. The average party difference between COW and House votes is 16.2% in the 92nd–98th Congresses (1971–1984). We see that without COW votes there is no discernible upward trend in average party distance until the mid-1980s. Again, a decomposition of the roll-call record into House and COW votes leads to the inference that no increase in party differences on House votes emerged until the mid-1980s.

Finally, mean party cohesion in the House and in the COW sheds light on interparty differences. Figures 4 and 5 show that majority party status is associated with higher levels of party cohesion on House votes. For the majority party Democrats (before a Republican majority was elected to the 104th Congress), House votes generated considerably more party unity than COW votes (amendment votes) but the difference evaporated just before and then after they lost majority status.[5] The Republican minorities showed the reverse pattern—higher COW party unity than House party unity. However this trend reverses

[4]The two trends show a statistically significant difference until the 99th Congress.

[5]There is a statistically significant difference in unity on House and COW votes from Democrats for the 93rd–101st Congresses only.

FIGURE 4 Democratic Party Cohesion by Vote Type

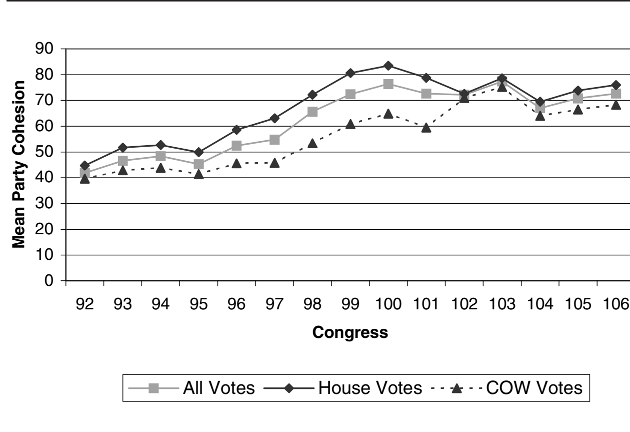
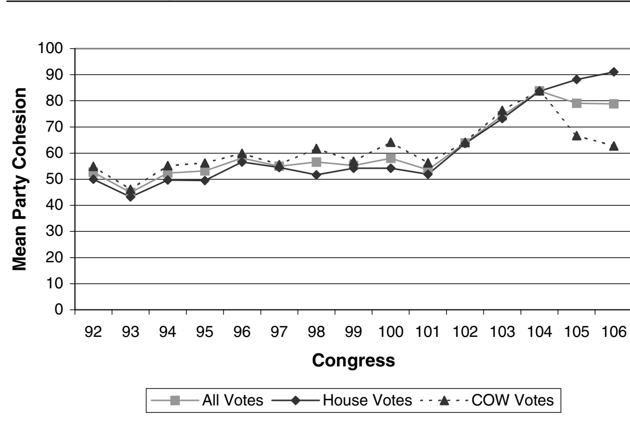


FIGURE 5 Republican Party Cohesion by Vote Type



after the Republicans gained majority status in 1995, and particularly in the second and third Congresses of majority status (the 105th and 106th)—as they proved more unified on House than on COW votes.[6] The general rule may be that the majority party exhibits greater unity on House votes (final passage, special rules, and so on) than on COW votes (amendment votes). Thus, the effect of the addition of COW votes to the roll-call record served to reduce the measured party cohesion based on all (party) votes for the majority party and to slightly increase cohesion for the minority party.

Dimensional Analysis of Voting

As the previous section clearly demonstrates, the addition of COW votes to the roll-call record affects the inferences we draw from aggregate measures of party voting. Dimensional analysis may provide a different view of party polarization than traditional party measures. Polarization is a function of two variables, the distance between the parties and the cohesiveness of the parties. A discovery of increasing distance between the parties, while cohesiveness within the parties is constant or increasing, is a more direct finding of polarization than the traditional party-voting measures. In order to determine if the addition of COW votes alters our inferences about the spatial alignment of legislators and parties, we explored differences in legislator policy positions through DW-NOMINATE scores (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). It is certainly plausible that the addition of a large number of votes with such stark differences in party divisions might affect both scores of individual legislators and summary statistics such as the distance between party means. This proved not to be the case. In fact, the correlation between the DW-NOMINATE scores calculated separately for the COW and the House are above 0.97 for all Congresses since 1971.[7] Thus, the alignment of legislators and parties in the COW is nearly identical to that seen for House votes for all Congresses, while party differences are much greater in the COW than in the House during most of the period since 1971.

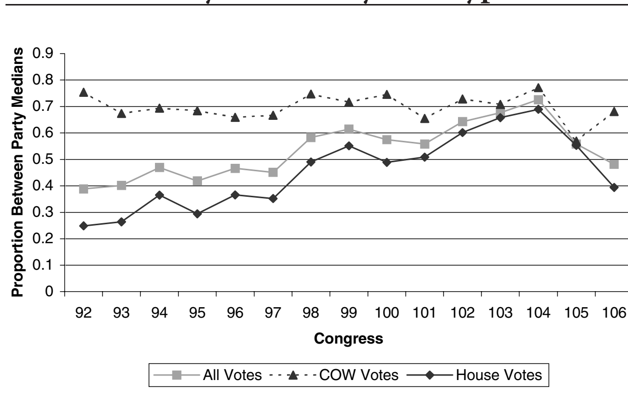
An examination of cutpoints for votes in the COW and House helps explain why COW and House DW-NOMINATE scores can be nearly identical while party-unity scores are so different. If House members face vote choices that are systematically different in the COW than in the House, the cutpoints may be systematically different and cause the frequency of partisan divisions to differ, even if members' underlying policy positions are the same in the two procedural settings. This appears to be the case, as is demonstrated in Figure 6, where the proportion of votes with cutpoints falling between the median members of the two parties are plotted.

Both the COW-House differences and the trends in COW and House cutpoints merit close inspection. As a general rule, COW cutpoints are located between the median members of the two parties much more often than House cutpoints, whereas House cutpoints tend to be shifted in the direction of the minority party, suggesting that these votes often generate bipartisan majorities. Because cutpoints can be interpreted as the location of policy proposals (assuming sincere behavior), Figure 6 makes plain that COW proposals generally divide party majorities. During most of the period, Republicans are in

[6]Republicans exhibit a statistically significant difference in unity on House and COW votes in only two congresses prior to them attaining a majority (98th and 100th), but two of the three in which they are the majority party (105th and 106th).

[7]DW-NOMINATE scores were calculated for three sets of votes, all votes, COW votes only, and House votes. While there is some variation over time, the correlations among all three series are greater than .9 for both dimensions.

FIGURE 6 Proportion of Cutpoints Between Party Medians by Vote Type



the minority and offer amendments in the COW that they hope will attract Democratic votes. They do this with some success, causing COW cutpoints to be located such that a few Democrats are on the Republican side of the cutpoint.

Critically, the proportion of *House* cutpoints falling between the party medians increased during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which reflects the increase in party polarization observed in this time period. At the same time, little change occurred in the COW cutpoints so that COW and House cutpoints became more similar. During the last Congress with a Democratic majority (103rd, 1993–94) and the first two Congresses of the new Republican majority (the 104th and 105th Congresses, 1995–1998), the proportion of COW and House cutpoints falling between the party medians shows virtually no difference.

Conditional Party Voting

The separation of COW and House voting sharpens our view of the nature of party polarization that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. The timing of polarization and the procedural context of voting are clearer. The relationship between party voting statistics, party differences in first-dimension measure of policy positions, and voting cutpoints is apparent, too. Specifically:

- The addition of COW votes to the roll-call record increased the observed level of partisanship, measured in traditional party voting statistics, in the 1970s.
- The addition of COW votes to the roll-call record did not change DW-NOMINATE scores but had a substantial effect on the location of cutpoints.
- Party polarization, measured in traditional party voting statistics, increased in the late 1980s and occurred primarily in House, as opposed to COW, votes.

Patterns of Changing Behavior

In testing the three hypotheses, we seek to determine the relationship of polarizing behavior to replacement and continuing membership, region, and former policy positions. To confirm *H1*, the Southern hypothesis, we must show that the replacement of southern Democrats with Republicans contributed more to polarization than we would have expected on the basis of change in the behavior of other legislators. To confirm *H2*, the New Breed hypothesis, we must show that the difference in voting behavior between exiting and new members is greater (and contributed to polarization) than the change we observe among continuing members. To confirm *H3*, the Party Strategy hypothesis, we must observe systematic change in the parties with moderate members of the parties (the more conservative Democrats, the more liberal Republicans) contributing more to increased polarization, controlling for region and whether they were new members. To test the hypotheses, we limit our analysis to House (as opposed to COW) votes as we have seen that the surges in polarization during the early 1980s and then again in the late 1980s and early 1990s are due primarily to House rather than COW votes.[8]

H1. The Southern Hypothesis

In Table 1 we report the mean party-unity scores for regional-party groups in three Congresses. A comparison of these Congresses allows us to determine which regional-party groups contributed most to the two waves of polarization. The 95th Congress (1977–1978) occurs before the first surge in party polarization, the 99th Congress (1985–1986) occurs before the second surge begins, and the 103rd Congress (1993–1994) represents the peak of party polarization.

Table 1 shows that southern representation among Republicans increased over the period, as we have noted. In terms of party support, southern Republicans exhibit consistently higher support and, with their increasing numbers, contributed to the increasing party unity observed for the party. Yet, because nonsoutherners outnumber southerners by about three-to-one, more of the increase is party unity is attributable to nonsoutherners

[8]As Figures 2–5 reveal voting patterns in the COW are very stable over time, leaving us with a dependent variable that has little to no variance. We also restrict attention to changes in party unity as opposed to DW-NOMINATE scores. The moving average component of the DW-NOMINATE algorithm constrains the extent to which an individual legislator's estimate can vary from year to year rendering comparison of change across new vs. old and continuing members meaningless. See Bond and Fleisher (2001) for a detailed analysis of change in NOMINATE scores across regions and parties.

Table 1 Party Unity by Region and Party (selected Congresses)

Congress	Southern Democrats	Non-Southern Democrats	Southern Republicans	Non-Southern Republicans
95th	61%	91.1%	84%	72.5%
(1977–78)	(85)	(205)	(28)	(119)
99th	85.7%	92.1%	81%	75.8%
(1985–86)	(78)	(175)	(43)	(139)
103rd	84%	91.5%	90%	85.4%
(1993–94)	(80)	(178)	(47)	(130)

Cell entries are mean party unity scores for House votes only with number of members in each cell in parentheses.

than to southerners. The increase in the mean party-unity score occurs in the late 1980s and early 1990s (between the 99th and 103rd Congresses), but not earlier. Table 2 shows that southern and nonsouthern Republicans contribute proportionately to the increase of party unity observed during this period.

The increase in the number of southern Republicans did not produce a complimentary decrease in the number of southern Democrats because of the growth of southern congressional delegations due to reapportionment. Among Democrats, as Table 1 reveals, southerners contributed disproportionately to the increase in party unity experienced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, although both southerners and nonsoutherners became at least marginally more supportive during that period. Neither group shows significant change in party support in the late 1980s and 1990s.

H1, the Southern hypothesis, is supported by the data, although the story is a more complicated than previously told. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the larger contingents of southern Republicans enhanced overall party unity in the party. In the late 1980s and early 1990s an increase in party unity occurred, but among both southern and nonsouthern Republicans. In contrast, the Democrats' movement to the left and their greater unity are due disproportionately to southerners, and the largest movement in party unity occurred in the early 1980s. Thus, the southern hypothesis finds some support for changes in the Democratic Party, but fails to fully explain observed changes in the Republican Party.

H2. The New Breed Hypothesis

Testing *H2*, the hypothesis that a new breed of legislator generated greater polarization, requires that we determine whether new legislators exhibit greater party support than the legislators they replaced and did so by a margin greater than the change observed for continuing members. Figures 7 and 8 provide, for successive pairs of Congresses, the mean change in party-unity scores for two sets of legislators in each party—(a) legislators who were members in both Congresses and (b) the departing and the new legislators. For both parties, the Congress-to-Congress differences between departing and new members in party-unity scores are usually greater than the change for continuing members.[9] However, continuing-member pairs, who vastly outnumber departing new-members pairs, are almost always responsible for a majority of the increase in the overall change in party-unity means. For example, for the Democrats during the three Congresses of rapid increases in party unity (the 98th–100th Congresses, 1983–1988), continuing members account for 59, 81, and 82% of the Congress-to-Congress increases in mean party-unity scores. For the Republicans in the 1991–1996 period (the 102nd–104th Congresses), continuing members account for 72, 50, and 57% of the Congress-to-Congress increases in mean party-unity scores. Replacement, therefore, sometimes accounts for a disproportionate share of the heightened party unity (replacement typically affects 10–20% of the membership), but continuing members' contribution to greater party unity is a vital part of the process of polarization. Thus, *H2*, the new-breed hypothesis, finds considerable support in the data, but it cannot explain the marked change in unity among continuing members.[10]

[9]This observed difference may be a product of shirking by retiring members than a strong show of party unity for new members (Rothenberg and Sanders 2000).

[10]It is important to note that assessing change in unity from congress to congress rather than absolute unity allows us to directly compare new and continuing members without having cohort effects of "new breed" members bias the results. While "new breed" members often had higher levels of unity, the data reveal no discernible cohort effect with regards to change in unity for continuing members.

TABLE 2 The Effects of Policy Position and Region on Change in Party Unity for Continuing Members, 1983–1996

	Democrats						
Congress	**98th** (1983–84)	**99th** (1985–86)	**100th** (1987–88)	**101st** (1989–90)	**102nd** (1991–92)	**103rd** (1993–94)	**104th** (1995–96)
DW-NOMINATE(t-1)	3.16	13.74*	6.66*	-8.29*	-9.91*	1.17	-33.44*
	(1.80)	(2.33)	(1.36)	(1.42)	(1.83)	(1.63)	(2.88)
South	2.21	4.53*	-0.64	-0.84	-1.42	0.70	-2.78*
	(1.19)	(1.32)	(0.74)	(0.73)	(0.97)	(0.85)	(1.37)
Northeast	-0.13	1.60	-1.30	-1.06	1.31	0.21	-0.52
	(1.05)	(1.21)	(0.70)	(0.70)	(0.92)	(0.84)	(1.40)
Midwest	0.56	0.89	-0.27	-0.93	2.31*	-0.76	0.07
	(1.05)	(1.20)	(0.67)	(0.68)	(0.90)	(0.81)	(1.40)
Constant	3.58*	5.99*	4.04*	-3.59*	-7.02*	2.17*	-16.46*
	(1.13)	(1.36)	(0.78)	(0.79)	(1.04)	(0.93)	(1.64)
Number of Cases	209	239	229	238	236	191	191
Adj. R-Square (SEE)	.07	.29	.12	.16	.26	.008	.44
	(4.88)	(5.99)	(3.32)	(3.44)	(4.46)	(3.73)	(6.46)
	Republicans						
Congress	**98th** (1983–84)	**99th** (1985–86)	**100th** (1987–88)	**101st** (1989–90)	**102nd** (1991–92)	**103rd** (1993–94)	**104th** (1995–96)
DW-NOMINATE(t-1)	16.11*	-5.62	3.12	3.50	-20.93*	-6.12*	-26.09*
	(3.01)	(5.64)	(3.69)	(3.59)	(4.42)	(2.52)	(2.58)
South	0.26	-3.07	-0.71	2.00	0.002	0.43	-0.53
	(1.49)	(2.44)	(1.68)	(1.53)	(1.80)	(1.02)	(0.97)
Northeast	0.51	1.50	0.13	0.38	-2.35	-0.65	-1.60
	(1.59)	(2.72)	(1.83)	(1.74)	(2.10)	(1.17)	(1.15)
Midwest	1.54	-0.90	0.77	0.69	-0.35	-0.65	-0.02
	(1.33)	(2.23)	(1.58)	(1.43)	(1.79)	(1.01)	(0.97)
Constant	-8.56*	2.22	-1.80	-2.71	13.64*	5.60*	16.24*
	(1.66)	(2.23)	(1.93)	(1.96)	(2.38)	(1.48)	(1.44)
Number of Cases	149	150	154	157	145	127	156
Adj. R-Square (SEE)	.001	.01	<.001	<.001	.12	.03	.41
	(9.53)	(9.53)	(7.09)	(6.30)	(7.49)	(3.87)	(4.31)

Shaded columns represent the periods of most rapid change for each party. The dependent variable is the change in a member's party unity on House votes from Congress t-1 to t. * = $p < .05$.

H3. The Party Strategy Hypothesis

Testing *H3*, the proposition that middle-of-the-road legislators were persuaded to alter their floor behavior in favor of the party, requires that we observe the relationship between liberal-conservative placement and extent of change in party unity. Table 2 provides the multivariate estimates for the effect of liberal-conservative policy position and region on Congress-to-Congress change in party-unity scores. The dependent variable is the amount of change in party unity from Congress t-1 to t. Thus for the column labeled 98th Congress the dependent variable is the change in the member's party unity from the 97th to 98th Congress. Policy position is measured as the first dimension DW-NOMINATE score in the first Congress of each pair of Congresses. The shaded columns represent the periods of the most rapid change in each of the parties. While the correlates of change in other pairs of Congress are informative, our primary concern is the identity of legislators who were responsible for the surges in polarization. The analysis is done only for continuing members for whom we have party-unity scores in successive Congresses.

FIGURE 7 Democratic Change in Unity

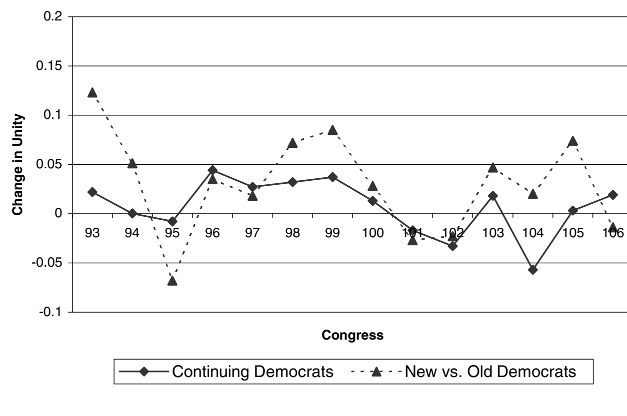
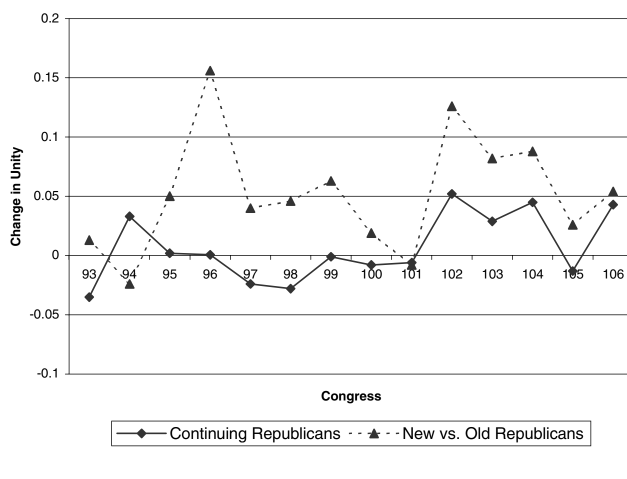


FIGURE 8 Republican Change in Unity



As Table 2 reveals, *H3* receives support from the data. For Democrats in the early 1980s, the positive coefficient for the intercept suggests an across the board increase in Democratic unity, but the coefficients for DW-NOMINATE in the first Congress of each pair of Congresses and for region show that conservativism and being southern are associated with a disproportionately strong increase in party unity. Thus, consistent with *H3*, the quantitative evidence corroborates the qualitative accounts of southern Democrats voting more and more like northern Democrats.

For Republicans of the early 1990s, the positive coefficient for the intercept terms suggests an across-the-board increase in Republican unity. For Republicans, we see no significant regional differences, which is consistent with the across-the-board strategies advocated by Newt Gingrich and the COW. The change in Republican strategy appears to be timed with a disproportionately large increase in party unity among party moderates, as evidenced by the statistically significant and negative coefficients for the DW-NOMINATE variable.

Discussion

Two methodological lessons bear repeating. First, inferences about floor voting are conditional on the procedural context in which the roll-call votes occur. We have identified one of the most radical changes in the composition of the roll-call record, but other changes may deserve our attention. Second, we have found important differences in the inferences that can be drawn from traditional voting indices and NOMINATE-based scores. Exclusive reliance on NOMINATE coordinates would have failed to pick up the different voting patterns in the COW and House, as the two sets of coordinates are almost indistinguishable. Shifts in cutpoints, not just legislators' coordinates, proved critical to understanding the consequences of party polarization. Changes in the cutpoints were reflected in the traditional party-voting measures.

Substantively, the evidence provides some support for all three explanations for the polarization of House parties since the early 1970s. Party polarization was more than a product of southern replacement and realignment and more than the by-product of new breed legislators. Rapid short-term change in party-unity scores in the late 1980s and the outward shift in the behavior among continuing moderate Republicans in the late 1980s and early 1990s are consistent with the view that Republican strategy contributed to polarization, as intended by Gingrich and his associates. The strategy may not have been particularly well coordinated but the guerilla tactics were deliberate and quite effective. Similarly, the rapid change in Democratic party-unity scores, which is associated disproportionately but not exclusively with southerners, is timed with the more aggressive strategies of the late O'Neill and Wright years of the 1980s.

Party matters, but we must qualify that conclusion in two ways. First, the analysis presented here does not allow us to claim that party pressure—the *direct* influence of leaders on rank-and-file legislators—has increased during the period under study. Rather, the evidence indicates that across-the-board changes in the behavior of partisans were timed with documented changes in leadership and rank-and-file legislators' strategies. Such changes in leadership strategy seem to be multifaceted, involving changes in policy proposals, willingness to compromise, time horizons, and the weight given to short- and long-term policy and electoral considerations. That is, the influence of party is a complicated matter than is not readily

captured in models that merely seek to measure party effects with a dummy variable, controlling for legislators' preferences.

Second, the Conditional Party Government thesis (Rohde 1991)—that polarization in the parties' electoral coalitions drives partisan polarization in Congress, which in turn spurs stronger party leadership and even more polarization—does not appear to fully capture the dynamic we observe in the late twentieth century. A reasonable conjecture is that polarizing electoral coalitions are a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition for party polarization in Congress. The translation of electoral coalition polarization into legislative polarization requires a response by legislative parties and their leadership, a response that may lag, may be timed differently for the two parties, and may not occur before the partisan alignment in the electorate changes again. These additional factors make polarization more problematic than is suggested by the Conditional Party Government thesis.

Central to the Conditional Party Government thesis is the proposition that leaders of a cohesive majority party are able to move rank-and-file behavior beyond what their initial policy preferences would suggest. We are sympathetic to a general perspective that there are increasing returns from cohesiveness—a "preferences-plus" argument—as is implied in the Conditional Party Government thesis. We would emphasize that *minority* party strategies are important, too. Indeed, as Binder (1997) emphasizes, party polarization and strategies reflect the interaction of majority and minority party actions.

The pattern of Republican floor behavior raises an important question about the nature of congressional parties. The Republicans' concerns about their long-term minority status increased sympathy for the party strategies advocated by Gingrich. Plainly, motivations beyond short-term policy and electoral goals, which are assumed to shape legislators' policy preferences and to underpin the electoral coalition and agenda accounts of polarization, were at work. At times, the *collective* interests of the party—its long-term electoral and policy interests—may be critical to understanding legislative behavior. We must pursue this complex topic in another place.

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