

Legislative Pruning: Committee Chair Elections and Majority Party Agenda Setting

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Legislative parties are commonly thought of as coalitions of like-minded, reelection seeking politicians. In reality, however, the beliefs of party members are heterogeneous. Recent studies show the degree of ideological variance within parties is neither constant across sessions nor between chambers. In spite of this variability, parties have an interest in projecting clear partisan signals to their electorate while also balancing the electoral prospects and partisan fidelity of members farthest from the party median. Accordingly, I argue that parties use institutional gate keeping mechanisms to engage in negative agenda setting not only against the minority party as has been previously shown, but also against the more ideologically fringe members of the majority party coalition. Drawing on the legislative histories of congressional bills introduced since World War II and common space ideology scores of legislators during this time, I show that the majority party protects its policy and electoral interests through committee gate-keeping mechanisms. Furthermore, the degree of convergence to the majority party median before and after the adoption of committee chair elections in 1971 speaks directly to the ongoing debate into the nature and sources of legislative party agenda control.

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Introduction

In recent scholarship on congressional parties the majority party's ability to set the policy agenda is paramount to its institutional power. In this article, I extend the logic of partisan agenda setting to account for the influence congressional committees have to serve as policy gatekeepers. Whereas a broad agreement has emerged that the majority party's negative agenda setting power originates with the majority control of the Rules Committee and its close relationship with Speaker of the House, few studies examine what role policy committees play earlier in the agenda setting process. Yet the textbook version of the legislative process requires bills to be first reported out of committees before the Speaker and the Rules Committee can structure the vote for floor consideration. The extant research pointing to the majority party's iron grip on the structuring of congressional action have largely ignored committee actions in the early process of lawmaking in lieu of examinations of party roll rates on the chamber floor (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Gailmard and Jenkins 2007; Stiglitz and Weingast 2010; Carson, Monroe, and Robinson 2011). The picture of the majority party that emerges from this literature strongly endorses theories of partisan agenda control, but questions remain about the extent parties also control committee behavior.

Opportunities for majority party to similarly exert control over the agenda at earlier stages of the political process remain understudied. Committee chairmen, which are universally drawn from the majority party in modern congressional institutions (Hinckley 1988; Oleszek 1989), can both populate and filter the pool of legislation available for consideration on the chamber floor. This study examines the bill reporting process of congressional committees in order to better our understanding of legislative organization, and to disambiguate the implications of party models of congressional activity.

Taking advantage of the rule change requiring the election of House committee chairmen at the beginning of the 1970's, I test whether this institutional change strengthened the majority party's control over the ideological fidelity of the legislation reported out of committees. Specifically, I draw on the legislative histories of congressional bills introduced

before, during, and after this reform, as well as bridged ideology scores of legislators during this time, to examine the ideological composition of legislation reported out of committee before and after the rule change. The data offer clear indications that increased majority party oversight of committee chairs beginning in 1971 altered the policy process for majority and minority party members.

The majority party prevents minority committee members' legislation from wider consideration on the floor, but the consequences of reform for majority party members are dynamic. Policy proposals are more likely to be reported the closer they are to the interests of the majority median member. Moreover, bills written by majority party members that were reported out of committee following the committee chairmen election were much less likely to be authored by partisans farther from median member of the chamber. This dynamic relationship between committee oversight and the ideological orientation of bill authors illustrate how agenda setting is conditional on institutional rules. Utilizing committee-reported Senate bills as a placebo test for the relationship, the findings appear unique to the adoption of election requirements of committee chairs.

In the following section I describe in greater detail the existing research on majority party negative and positive agenda setting, and discuss some of the associated changes in legislative organization that have mediated these agenda powers. The subsequent section lays out the role of policy committees in populating the agenda with legislative proposals, and competing hypotheses for how changes in committee accountability should alter that agenda setting process. I then describe the data and the testing case for examining the implications of cartel and conditional party hypotheses, before turning to the empirical strategy of the paper. I present the empirical results, and lastly conclude with a discussion regarding the implication of the results in context to existing literature.

Party Models v. Pivotal Models of Legislative Behavior

A commonly held view in congressional research is that political parties are coalitions of like-minded politicians (Krehbiel 1993; Krehbiel 1998; Saeki 2009). From this perspective, if the trappings of political parties were eliminated like-minded legislators would behave essentially the

same. In this “Pivotal Politics” model the pivotal members of congress—the median voter in the House and the critical Senator to make or break a filibuster in the Senate—largely dictate the directions and size of policy shifts away from the status quo (Krehbiel 1998).

In contrast to this view, others maintain that congressional parties protect the collective interests of these like-minded coalition members by giving power to key institutional actors to influence policy outcomes in a manner advantageous to the coalition’s preferences (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Rohde 1991). In particular, the majority party coalition inhibits bills from reaching the House floor through the Rules Committee that would otherwise split the party or, worse yet, roll the majority by passing legislation without the support of a majority of the majority party. Preventing the majority party roll is so engrained in the functioning of the modern party system it has its own colloquial name, the Hastert Rule, after the Majority Leader who made it famous in the 2000s. This negative agenda setting is critical to the preservation of the like-minded majority cartel.

In the procedural cartel theory of party government the key source of power for legislative parties is the ability to control the agenda (Cox and McCubbins 1993; 2005). This influence over the legislative process allows the majority party to not only determine which issues come to the floor for votes (positive agenda setting), but also the issues that are prevented from coming to the floor (negative agenda setting). Cox and McCubbins (2005) show that the roll rate of the median voter of the majority party is much less than the roll rate of the chamber median voter. Additional analyses of majority party roll rates corroborate the core claim of procedural cartel theory that the majority party’s protection of the floor is iron clad.

Both parties are equally protective of the majority roll. Roll rates of the majority party following the 1994 “Republican revolution” validate the modern universality of negative agenda control, and demonstrate the bipartisan nature of negative agenda control (Carson, Monroe, and Robinson 2011). Despite the absence of institutional gate keeping powers similar to the House, majority roll rates in the Senate indicate similar negative agenda setting processes (Gailmard and Jenkins 2007). Other studies find partisan control of the agenda in state legislative institutions (Cox, Kousser, & McCubbins 2010; Jackman 2013), as well as in other

countries (Calvo and Sagarzazu 2011). Using cutpoint estimate evidence from floor votes to assess how floor voting splits the chamber, an alternative to majority party roll rates, Stiglitz and Weingast (2010) find evidence that fewer unexpected splits of the chamber occur in the procedural cartel models of agenda setting than in the pivotal politics model. When treated as testable alternatives there are fewer deviations from theoretical predictions in procedural cartel theory than the pivotal politics model.

Beyond the chamber floor, the majority party also rigs the legislative process in favor of its disadvantaged members. Jenkins and Monroe (2012) show in a formal model that moderate majority-party members are made worse off by the exercise of partisan agenda control, while those to the extreme side of the majority-party median benefit. This malapportionment of benefits from positive and negative agenda control produces tradeoffs for members of the majority coalition. Empirical tests of the model find that moderate members of the majority coalition receive financial campaign support from party leaders, suggesting a form of side-payment reimbursement for accepting the party's policy choices (Jenkins and Monroe 2012).

In light of the evidence in support of negative agenda setting in the post-Reed Rules era of congressional politics, Cox and McCubbins (2002) claim that procedural protection of the majority agenda is an *unconditional* term of party government. To a lesser extent they argue anticipation by committee chairs serves the purpose of screening legislation that may divide and defeat the majority party on a floor vote. Both claims are questioned elsewhere in the legislative parties literature.

The fundamental relationship between a majority party's power over the agenda and a majority party member's willingness to abrogate that power and place it in the hands of party leadership is inextricably linked to what it means for co-partisans to be like-minded. In conditional party government, a distinct but similarly party-centric view of legislator behavior as procedural cartel theory, holds that intra-party preference similarity and inter-party preference differences are preconditions for cartel-like behavior from the majority party (Rohde 1981; Finoccharo and Rohde 2008). The cartel party and conditional party models of legislative organization offer broadly complementary views of majority party power, but do differ on key

points. A core assumption of the procedural cartel model is that institutional gatekeepers put in place by the majority party reflect the party's interests. They specifically seek to maintain the party brand for electoral success by ushering centrist policies within the majority party through the legislative process (Cox and McCubbins 2005). Consequently, the preferences of the median legislator of the majority party will represent the best interests of the majority party. Although less attention is paid to the ability of the majority party to engage in positive agenda setting that produces legislation reflective of its median member interests, it is an implicit consequence of the model of partisan agenda control.

Conditional party government, in contrast, stresses the importance of the ideological homogeneity within the majority party and differences between minority and party medians as preconditions for inducing majority party agenda setting (Rohde 1991; Aldrich and Rohde 1997; Aldrich 1995). When the preferences of a party's members are heterogeneous and the party medians are not very different, backbenchers may not trust strong leaders to pursue strategies that could adversely affect reelection prospects. Finocchiaro and Rohde (2008) find that passage of Rules Committee votes for procedural control of the floor agenda correspond to the degree of the majority party's homogeneity. But where conditional party government and procedural theory of government most strongly diverge is in the positive agenda setting process that occurs prior to the uptake of bills by the Speaker of the House and the Rules Committee. In this regard, examining changes in the majority party's control over committee gatekeepers serves as a compelling testing ground for predictions of these theories of partisan control of Congress. But to better understand how committees ought to behave in partisan models we must also recognize how institutional changes could also impact their behavior. The consequences of the election of committee chairs and its potential interaction with partisan agenda setting begins with an understanding of the context in which the institutional reform occurred.

Committee Chair Selection Procedures

Following the 1968 congressional and presidential elections the Executive Committee of the House's Democratic Study Group sought strategies to prevent the continued entrenchment of conservative Democrats in leadership positions. The Democratic Study Group, which was

originally intended to provide legislative research and organizational support to the party's more progressive membership, saw the election of a Republican to the White House as a potential threat to the future partisan fidelity of conservative, well-established committee chairs in the Democratic House (Rhode 1991). One proposal to prevent policy backsliding that originated out the new electoral landscape was an automatic secret ballot at the beginning of each congressional session for committee chairmanships (Sheppard 1985). Over the next several years the proposal to rein in committee chairmen gained traction as evidence mounted that conservative Democrats were responsible for the defeat of several Democratic proposals. Rohde (1991) notes that policy motivations were not the only impetus for reform. The policy failures aligned with the self-interested motives of party backbenchers seeking to secure individual power and bolster reelection prospects. Over time the proposed reform gained wider traction beyond just the progressive wings of the party.

In 1971 the Democratic caucus voted and adopted a rule to permit caucus votes on any committee chairman if requested by ten members. By 1973 the rule expanded to make votes automatic for all committee chairs at the beginning of each Congressional session. Moreover, the vote would be held by secret ballot if requested by more than a fifth of the party members. In a few short years the majority party Democrats transitioned from a seniority-based appointment process to an election process where, however infrequent, sitting committee chairmen could be deposed by the rank-and-file of their party. While the relative infrequency of deposed chairs could suggest limited accountability produced by the reform, infrequent checks on behavior elsewhere in legislative politics provide considerable influence on decisions (Cameron 2000).

In more recent majority party switches in 1994, 2006 and 2010, the original caucus election rules adopted in 1971 have remained in place (Aldrich and Rohde 1997; Gailmard and Jenkins 2007). In the next section I outline how the adoption of the election rule for committee chairs offers an opportunity to test the delegation of accountability and authority within congressional parties.

Theory and Hypotheses

When a member of Congress introduces a piece of legislation they do so with some hope that the policy may be enacted into law. If a member's behavior is best understood through the lens of securing re-election, as is often claimed (see Mayhew 1973), then at each stage of the legislative process—from introduction to enactment—there lies an opportunity to trumpet the importance of the policy to constituents and to claim credit for fighting for that policy's success. And while a textbook depiction of Congress may lead one to believe that the legislative process is a meritocratic affair, where the best policies rise to the top, evidence to the contrary is in no shortage of supply. In the end bills are merely vehicles for policy ideas, which can be added to and subtracted from at many stages in the legislative process (Adler and Wilkerson 2013). A bill's author, in this respect, captains a ship of original and cannibalized policies into harbor on the desk of the President, to reap the lion's share of the credit. The debate over the nature of majority party power is both a function of which policies are considered viable for enactment and which legislators are worthy of receiving credit for bill passage.

Two key assumptions underscore the remainder of the argument. First, all else equal, a bill reported out of committee is both more likely to be a legislative vehicle for policy proposals or to have its policy ideas incorporated into other bills. Second, the ideology of a policy proposer's author correlates with the ideological position of the policy proposal contained within. If a conservative and liberal legislator draft policy proposals to solve the same issue one would expect that on average a cut point on the roll call votes would reflect the bill authors' ideological position. To the extent the above assumptions are true, one can locate the ideological space a proposal occupies by identifying the bill author's ideology. And if that proposal becomes more likely to receive future attention as either a stand alone bill or as incorporated text in another bill then changes in the distribution of bills reported out of committee reflect changes in both positive and negative agenda setting. Similarly, when institutional reforms such as the adoption of committee chair elections alter the distribution of bills reported from committee it also speaks to the nature of partisan control of the agenda setting process.

The procedural cartel (Cox and McCubbins 1993; 2005) and conditional party government (Rohde 1991; Aldrich and Rohde 1997) models of congressional party behavior

provide similar arguments about the importance of parties in congressional activities. Parties have an interest in projecting clear party brand to their electorate while undercutting the minority party's ability to do the same.

They both stand as a clear alternative to the pivotal politics model (Krehbiel 1993; 1998), which maintains congressional activity is best understood as an aggregation of individual political decisions. For the pivotal politics model, chair elections should have little effect on the distribution of policy produced by committees. In a world absent of political party influence the election of committee chairs (or merely its threat) should not affect the distribution of legislative policies reported out of committees. Because policy products are reflective of the pivotal member of the deciding body chairman elections would only influence the distribution of policies should the election alter the underlying composition of committees:

Hypothesis₁: The adoption of chairman elections at the beginning of Congressional sessions in the majority party caucus will decrease the likelihood minority party member' legislative proposals are reported out of committee.

Cox and McCubbins (1993) have argued that committee government is best thought of as a decentralized form of party government. If true one should expect to find similar agenda setting activity within policy committees as is seen in the Rules Committee that reflect the interests of the majority party. But procedural cartel theory differs from conditional party government theory on whether committee government is inherently bestowed with the unconditional ability to keep issues off the legislative agenda.

According to conditional party government the majority party's power to police the fidelity of congressional committees is conditional on the homogeneity of the majority party. For example, the Rules Committee during the conservative coalition era from 1937 to 1952 pushed policy initiatives to the floor that were out of step with the rest of the Democratic Congress. Schickler and Pearson (2009) point to 44 initiatives brought the floor by the Rules Committee despite prominent opposition from the rest of the Democratic Party. Following compositional changes to the party and the subsequent 1961 "packing" of the Rules Committee by liberal Democrats, the likelihood that conservative southern Democrats were rolled on the floor

significantly increased, suggesting an abrupt shift in the committee's fidelity to the majority party (Jenkins and Monroe 2012).

An alternative explanation to party-based explanations for the intransigence of the Rules Committee to its majority party members in the 1940's also speaks to a long-observed and more general power of congressional committees. Shepsle and Weingast (1987) point to the agenda setting power possessed by committees as a source of their power, which is reinforced by a norm of deference that is reciprocated across committees. But if congressional committees are the source of the preponderance of legislative text enacted into law, what powers in committees govern the composition of the policy space? The clearest evidence of committee power dynamics lies in the distribution of pork-barrel spending in the appropriations process. Fenno observes that committee membership on the appropriations committee benefits individual member reelection goals (Fenno 1962), while he and others note (i.e. Fenno 1973; Weingast 1979) that a norm of universalism pervades decisions made in committee. This pork-barrel universalism arises out of the collective interests by both minority and majority members to win reelection and the uncertainty of ones own majority status in the future. Taken to the logical extreme by Krehbiel (1993), committees are purely the collection of individual reelection seekers, and the median interest on the committee should govern policy outcomes. Contrasted against the partisan models we can produce the following competing hypotheses:

Hypothesis_{2a}: *If party influence on committee agenda setting is unconditional, then the committee chair's electoral accountability to the majority party will have **little impact** on the likelihood legislative proposals ideologically proximate to the party median will be reported out of committee (**Procedural Cartel Theory**).*

Hypothesis_{2b}: *If party influence on committee agenda setting is conditional on party strength then the committee chair's electoral accountability to the majority caucus will **increase** the likelihood legislative proposals ideologically proximate to the party median will be reported out of committee (**Conditional Party Government Theory**).*

Hypothesis_{2c}: *If party influence on committee agenda setting does not matter, then legislative proposals of authors ideologically proximate to the chamber median will be most likely reported out of committee and it will be unaffected by increased chair accountability (**Pivotal Politics Model**).*

Party-centric models of behavior take members' reelection goals as a first assumption. If the majority party actively structures the policy output of committees to its advantage, who

within the party should benefit? In the appropriations process majority party members those from more electorally vulnerable districts, acquire a disproportionate share of earmarked pork barrel projects (Engstrom and Vanberg 2010). Are committees structured to meet party goals of maintaining a quality brand name in pursuit of reelection? Are policy proposals of electorally vulnerable legislators more likely to receive attention after the reform? Partisan models suggest this would be true:

Hypothesis: If party control of committee agenda setting is aimed toward maintaining majority party status then the credit claiming opportunities afforded by reporting bills out of committee will be more frequent by electorally vulnerable members and this effect would be strengthened by committee chair accountability.

Data & Methodology

To test the hypotheses outlined in the previous section I utilize the Congressional Bills Dataset compiled by Adler and Wilkerson (2012), which contains the legislative histories of House and Senate bills introduced since the 80th Congress (1947). The dataset includes a host of information about the bill authors, including party membership, seniority, and positions of stature—committee chairs and chamber leaders. Of particular interest from this legislative history data is the stage any given bill reached in the legislative process by end of the congressional session. For all of the following analyses the dependent variable is a dichotomous event variable of whether or not a bill was reported out of committee. Table 1 reports the full list of variables used.²

To better understand the differences in bills that succeed and stall at this stage I incorporate individual ideology point estimates of the bill authors, as well as the aggregate chamber and party ideologies. I rely on the most commonly used measure of ideological preferences for legislators for my key independent variable: DW-NOMINATE scores developed by Poole and Rosenthal (1997). Poole and Rosenthal derive an ideological score for each member using a dimensional analysis of roll call votes throughout the entirety of their legislative

² In total, I am able to link individual author ideology to bill progress for 432,628 out of 434,794 bills. The remaining bills are omitted from the analysis. A cursory search for the legislation listing no author suggests that most were private bills intended for legal exceptions for individuals (i.e. immigration) or bills introduced on the floor, which circumvent normal legislative proceedings.

careers. Utilizing members of Congress that span multiple legislative sessions as ideological bridges between different Congresses and chambers, the DW-Nominate score offers an ideal point estimate that is comparable to other MCs in previous and future Congresses. One potential drawback from this method of ideal point estimation, however, is the fact that a legislator's ideology is fixed across legislative sessions and cannot fluctuate over time. As a robustness check I also run all the models using NOMINATE scores normalized for each legislative session. The normalized scores range from -1 (very liberal) to +1 (very conservative) and incorporate only the roll call votes within a particular legislative session, which allows for legislators to shift their ideology over the course of their career. From these individual and aggregate point estimates of ideology I estimate an ideological distance variable taken as the absolute value of the difference between bill authors and the ideological median of the majority party, the minority party and the whole chamber. This produces three separate distance values.

In order to further test the party-based motivations of reporting bills out of committee I integrate congressional election returns collected by Jacobson (2007) into the dataset. I take the winning vote share in the previous election for bill authors to serve as a measure of electoral vulnerability. Lower vote shares signal greater electoral vulnerability. I impute winning vote shares for candidates in uncontested elections from a normal distribution centered one standard deviation above the average vote share of election winners. The specification choice makes little to no difference on the point estimates.

To indicate the adoption of the committee chair elections in 1971 I code the dummy variable "Elect Chair"=1. I calculate the spatial distance between the bill author's ideal point estimate and both the median ideology of the majority party and the median ideology of the chamber. Both distances are calculated as absolute values. Table 1 reports summary statistics of the variables.

I use logistic regression models to estimate the likelihood of a bill being reported out of a committee before and after the adoption of the committee reform. I account for linear time trends using a year count, in addition to fixed effects for congressional session. Robust standard errors are clustered on the individual legislator to correct for residual correlation.

Results

The results presented in Table 2 confirm the first hypothesis. Adopting committee chairman elections significantly reduced the number of bills reported out of committee from minority members. Figure 1 shows the raw relationship between the number of reported bills and party before and after the rule change. The difference between parties in the total number of bills being reported from committee is apparent before and after the reform, yet it appears to stay relatively consistent. As Figure 2 illustrates most of the change is in the denominator. The rate at which majority members see their bills reported out of committee jumps sharply following the committee reforms, while the minority party remains level. Though minority party members begin to introduce more legislation in the post-reform era less of it is passing through committees to the next stage of consideration.

Shifting the focus to the actions of the majority party, Table 3 reports results from logistic regressions predicting the success of just majority party members' bills. Column 1 of Table 3 shows the non-interacted ideological distance terms. As a majority party author's ideology approaches their party median their bill is more likely to be reported. In contrast, the closer a member of the majority is to the median voter of the chamber it decreases their bills success. Columns 2, 3, and 4 display interactions between ideological distance and committee chair election reform first individually and then separately. In the final specification with both interaction terms, the adoption of chair elections significantly alters the rate at which different ideologically disparate bills are adopted.

Because the magnitude of logistic regression coefficients is not readily interpretable Figure 3 and Figure 4 graphically depicted the interaction between ideological distance and reform on bill advancement. Figure 3 illustrates the partisan effects of committee chair elections: after the reform bill authors farther in the ideological space from the party median are substantially less likely to have their policy proposals reported. Both before and after reform ideologically central authors achieve high and unfettered success. The marginal effects plot overlays a kernel density curve in corresponding color depicting the distribution of bill author ideal points. While some small differences before and after reform are visible the underlying distribution of preferences does not explain the differences.

The reform's impact on ideological distance from the chamber median shown in Figure 4 is equally telling of partisan influence. Prior to reform bill proposals are reported out of committee the closer the author is to the chamber's median voter at a rate of around 17%. However, that rate drops roughly 12% after the reform. And while ideological distance from the chamber median is always negatively correlated with the likelihood of discharge from committee, the relationship is much stronger prior to the reform. Simply put, the evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that majority party influence on the committee reporting process was strengthened by the adoption of committee chair elections beginning in 1971. The regression coefficients in Table 5 are for models that where static W-NOMINATE scores replace the dynamic bridged DW-NOMINATE scores. The W-NOMINATE scores use roll call votes exclusively within each congressional session. The result is unchanged for the pre-post interaction with ideological distance between the bill author and the median voter of the chamber; however, the party distance interaction is no longer significant.

The regression coefficients reported in Figure 5 show that the adoption of election rules had no impact on the increased consideration of legislation by electorally vulnerable members. While the majority party's control of the committee process was reinforced by the committee election reforms, it has no systematic effect for steering a greater share of credit claiming opportunities to the majority coalition's most vulnerable members. Moreover, there is similarly no evidence of selectively preventing legislation the minority party' from advancing before or after the reform.

Given the dynamic period in American politics over which the present study spans, the demonstrated results may be plausibly caused by alternative means. To the extent the House and Senate are impacted by similar omitted variables, the placebo regressions of the reform on Senate committees unaffected by the House reforms should pick up any spurious relationships. Neither interaction term of interest (Reform*Distance_From_Majority_Median or Reform*Distance_From_Chamber_Median) is significant in Table 4. There is a main effect associated with the dummy variable indicating reform, which is simply picking up non-linear time trends in the rate of bills reporting out of committee.

Discussion

I show that the majority party protects its policy and election interests using committee gatekeepers to reduce the variability of legislative proposals ready for floor consideration. I find increased convergence to the majority party's median member after the 1970's House rule changes.

Committee reforms at the beginning of the 1970's reduced minority party members' ability to push their bills through committee. Of equal importance, however, is that the agenda setting powers of committees were strengthened by the election reforms. This casts some doubt on the claims that party government is unconditional in its ability to keep issues off the legislative agenda. A strict interpretation of procedural cartel theory would predict no change in the composition of bills reported by committees before and after the election of committee chairs because the model is time invariant. But the heightened accountability afforded to the majority caucus following the committee elections did produce a systematically more congruous legislative platform.

Most interestingly, the evidence also suggests that party government engages in negative agenda setting power on members of its own party. While the committee reforms may have originally been intended to reign in intransigent seniority chairs, the consequences within the rest of the majority caucus are wide reaching. All told, when institutional rules allow the majority party to sanction committee chairs, committee chairs mark-up and report legislation authored by members closer to the party median. One consequence of this increased party fidelity is that reported legislation is less likely to be written by moderate members closer to the chamber median. Interestingly, the committee reform did little to improve the electoral credit claiming opportunities for electorally vulnerable members. It would seem that individual election-seeking activity does not translate into majority party support of legislative proposals of the party's most electorally vulnerable members. Committee election reforms had little impact on backbenchers' likelihood of advancing their legislative proposals, even as more senior chairmen were held accountable by chair elections.

Future Directions

The conclusions presented in this study open up a number of future paths of inquiry. First, to verify and bolster these findings one can examine the composition of individual committees and the subsequent legislation reported out of them. Integrating into the present study a full list of legislators' committee assignments and the committee origins of reported bills would provide the opportunity for a more robust multi-level analysis. The present analysis assumes that the ideological composition of individual committees is generally reflective of the wider chamber as a whole, despite considerable evidence to the contrary (see Weingast and Marshall 1988). Compositional differences in committees and their differential rate of reporting partisan legislation could be an alternative explanation to the reported findings, although that too would have interesting implications.

Second, additional analysis regarding the differential impact of the committee reforms on the majority and minority party. While the present analysis focuses on the role committee chair elections affect the consideration of bills by majority party members there is no reason to believe that similar impacts on minority party proposals would not occur as well. If, as observed with the distribution of majority party bill authors, the committee reforms produce a more partisan reporting process, minority members' bills should be equally affected. Electorally vulnerable members could be denied the electoral credit claiming of pushing a bill out of committee increasingly accountable to the majority caucus. Alternatively, bills of minority party members ideologically more proximate to the majority may be more likely to be reported out of committee if it might win their support elsewhere on key legislation, or somehow tarnish the other party's brand name.

Third, committee chair elections were a single reform among many that originated in the Democratic Study Group in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Though scholars attribute the centralization of political parties and rise of power of the majority party collectively to the reforms, comparatively little work has assessed the consequences of individual reforms on specific changes in the trends of policymaking and legislative behavior. Just as the present study assesses the consequences of committee chair elections on reported legislation, other institutional reforms may similarly alter the legislative process in important ways. For example,

committee leadership turnover caused by term limits adopted by the Republican caucus in 1994 could produce special interest capture as observed in the state (Carey et al. 2006).

Conclusion

The findings speak directly to the ongoing debate into the nature and sources of majority party agenda control. These results extend the role of negative agenda setting beyond the power of the Rules Committee and Speaker to the committees' favorable reporting of legislation. Moreover, the committee chairman election reform also demonstrates that the majority party actively limits the legislative process within the party well before any legislation reaches the floor. Members closer to the party median are systematically more likely to have their bills reported from the committee after reforms improving accountability for the bill reporting process. In this sense, negative and positive agenda setting are inextricably linked. By increasingly keeping the proposals of ideologically fringe party members out of the pool of legislation ready for floor proceedings, the institutional reform narrows the representation of the party brand name to members closer to the ideological core. But recognizing how the party cultivates a brand name in office is only half the picture. Electoral benefits of the refined brand name are widely assumed to be shared by the party as a whole, although until recently (e.g. Grimmer et al. 2012) such assumptions have gone untested.

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Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Data

VARIABLES	Obs.	Mean	SE	Min	Max
<u>Legislator Characteristics</u>					
Author Ideal Point (DW-1)	432628	-0.083	0.351	-1.22	1.611
Author-Chamber Median Distance	432628	0.295	0.193	0.000	1.668
Author-Maj. Party Median Distance	432628	0.308	0.274	0.000	1.940
Previous Election Vote Share	259410	64.869	9.486	50.000	100.000
Freshman Member	304204	0.153	0.360	0	1
Committee Chair	434794	0.456	0.498	0	1
Chamber Leader	434794	0.009	0.093	0	1
Party	432629	139.299	49.171	100	200
Private Bill	434794	0.184	0.387	0	1
<u>Chamber Characteristics</u>					
Chair Election Reform	434794	0.525	0.499	0	1
Year	435285	1974.226	16.961	1947	2010
Congress	435285	93.456	8.474	80	111
Majority Party (=1)	432264	0.635	0.482	0	1
Senate (=1)	434794	0.261	0.439	0	1
Reported from Committee (=1)	434794	0.092	0.288	0	1
House Majority Median (DW-1)	434794	-0.167	0.283	-0.367	0.582
House Minority Median (Dw-1)	434794	0.171	0.241	-0.386	0.655
House Minority Homogeneity (DW-1 St.Dv)	434794	0.162	0.018	0.131	0.213
House Majority Homogeneity (DW-1 St.Dv)	434794	0.189	0.025	0.132	0.220
House Majority Size (# over 218)	434794	253.903	21.704	221	295
House Chamber Median (DW-1)	434794	-0.022	0.138	-0.184	0.392

Table 2 Logistic Regression of Bill Reported Out of Committee by Party (Dynamic Ideal Point)

VARIABLES DV: Bill Reported from Committee	Both Interactions
Majority Party	0.828*** (0.067)
Elected Committee Chair Reform	-.0590*** (0.070)
Majority*Elected Committee Chair Reform	0.843*** (0.081)
Constant	-15.95*** (3.70)
Controls	YES
Congress Fixed Effects	YES
Observations	319,328

Robust Standard Errors (Clustered on Member) in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3 Logistic Regression on Bill Reported Out of Committee for Majority Party Members (Dynamic Ideal Point)

VARIABLES DV: Bill Reported from Committee	No Interactions	Majority Distance Interaction	Chamber Distance Interaction	Both Interactions
Author–Chamber Median Distance	-1.566*** (0.220)		-2.592*** (0.337)	-2.646*** (0.320)
Author–Chamber Med. Dist.*Reform			2.282*** (0.373)	2.372*** (0.378)
Author–Majority Median Distance	0.554** (0.223)	0.0500 (0.463)		0.843** (0.374)
Author–Majority Med Dist.*Reform		-0.263 (0.479)		-0.921** (0.412)
Elected Committee Chair Reform	1.361 (1.685)	1.198 (1.692)	0.984 (1.719)	1.043 (1.720)
Party	0.00342 (0.00209)	0.00309* (0.00183)	0.00295 (0.00187)	0.00313* (0.00185)
Chamber Leader	0.705*** (0.135)	0.584*** (0.133)	0.602*** (0.134)	0.598*** (0.135)
Private Bill	0.266*** (0.0698)	0.200*** (0.0738)	0.292*** (0.0712)	0.304*** (0.0710)
Year	-0.0254 (0.0266)	-0.0244 (0.0265)	-0.0255 (0.0268)	-0.0247 (0.0268)
Constant	47.73 (51.84)	45.62 (51.55)	48.17 (52.17)	46.49 (52.13)
Congress Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	204,189	204,189	204,189	204,189

Robust Standard Errors (Clustered on Member) in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4 Logistic Regression Estimate of likelihood Senate bill is reported Pre-Post House Committee Rule Change (Placebo Test)

Variables	DW-Nominate (Dynamic)	W-Nominate (Static)
DV: Bill Reported from Committee		
Author-Chamber Median Distance	-1.045*** (0.258)	-0.997*** (0.250)
Author-Chamber Med. Dist.*Reform	0.428 (0.432)	0.168 (0.470)
Author -Majority Median Distance	-0.437 (0.457)	0.615** (0.311)
Author -Majority Med Dist.*Reform	0.835* (0.440)	-0.209 (0.417)
Elected Committee Chair Reform	9.920*** (1.868)	9.899*** (1.871)
Party	0.00162 (0.00181)	0.00165 (0.00184)
Chamber Leader	0.227 (0.152)	0.223 (0.148)
Private Bill	0.0912 (0.0731)	0.0911 (0.0736)
Year	-0.171*** (0.0304)	-0.171*** (0.0304)
Constant	330.6*** (59.17)	331.0*** (59.13)
Congress Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes
Observations	70,070	70,070

Robust Standard Errors (Clustered on Member) in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 5 Effect of Chair Election Adoption on Bill Reported Out of Committee (Static Ideology Score)

VARIABLES DV: Bill Reported from Committee	No Interactions	Majority Distance Interaction	Chamber Distance Interaction	Both Interactions
Author-Chamber Median Distance	-1.584*** (0.213)		-2.620*** (0.307)	-2.611*** (0.304)
Author-Chamber Med. Dist.*Reform			2.151*** (0.349)	2.188*** (0.363)
Author -Majority Median Distance	0.312 (0.233)	-0.0724 (0.516)		0.267 (0.404)
Author -Majority Med Dist.*Reform		-0.235 (0.537)		-0.383 (0.450)
Elected Committee Chair Reform	1.400 (1.689)	1.234 (1.695)	0.960 (1.715)	1.019 (1.717)
Party	0.00344 (0.00211)	0.00323* (0.00191)	0.00294 (0.00188)	0.00320* (0.00192)
Chamber Leader	0.692*** (0.130)	0.579*** (0.132)	0.608*** (0.131)	0.603*** (0.133)
Private Bill	0.266*** (0.0694)	0.200*** (0.0736)	0.298*** (0.0701)	0.300*** (0.0701)
Year	-0.0264 (0.0266)	-0.0248 (0.0265)	-0.0259 (0.0267)	-0.0258 (0.0267)
Constant	49.61 (51.76)	46.33 (51.60)	48.97 (52.04)	48.67 (51.99)
Congress Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	204,113	204,129	204,113	204,113

Robust Standard Errors (Clustered on Member) in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 1 Number of Bills Reported out of Committees Between Minority and Majority Parties

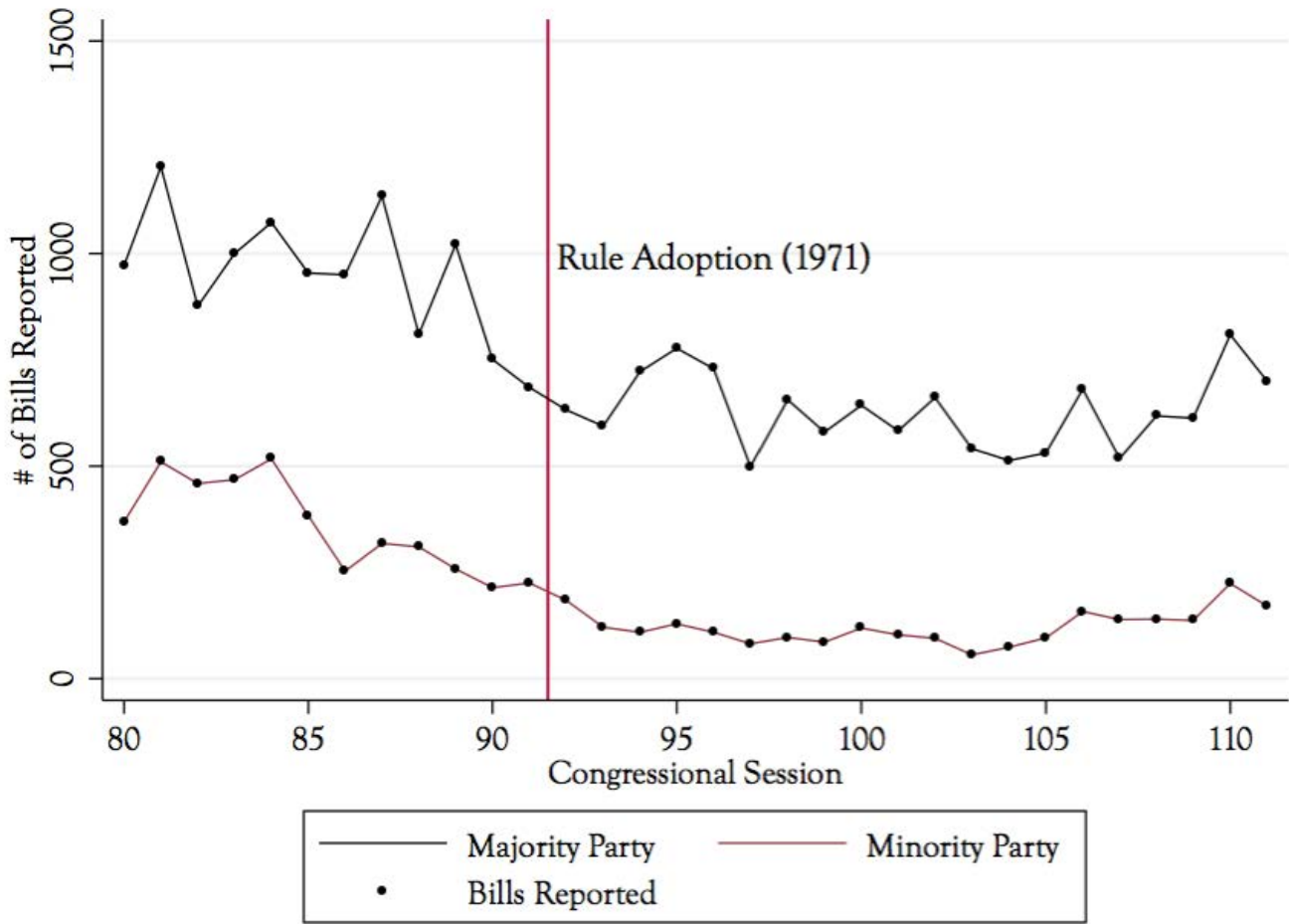


Figure 2 Rate of Bill Adoption Pre-Post Committee Chair Election

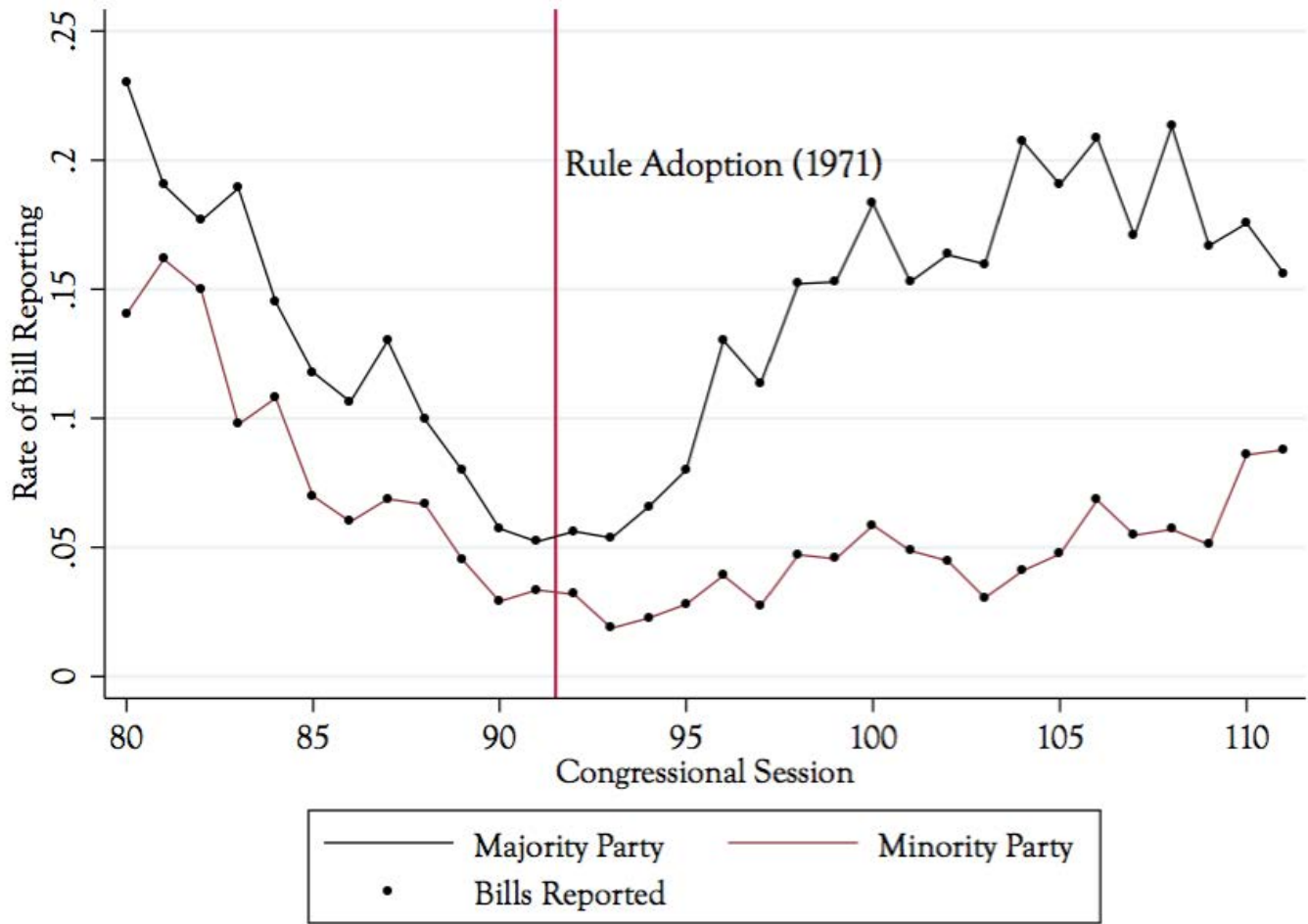


Figure 3 Impact of Committee Discharge Rate Pre-Post Reform Across Distance from Party Median (Majority Party Members)

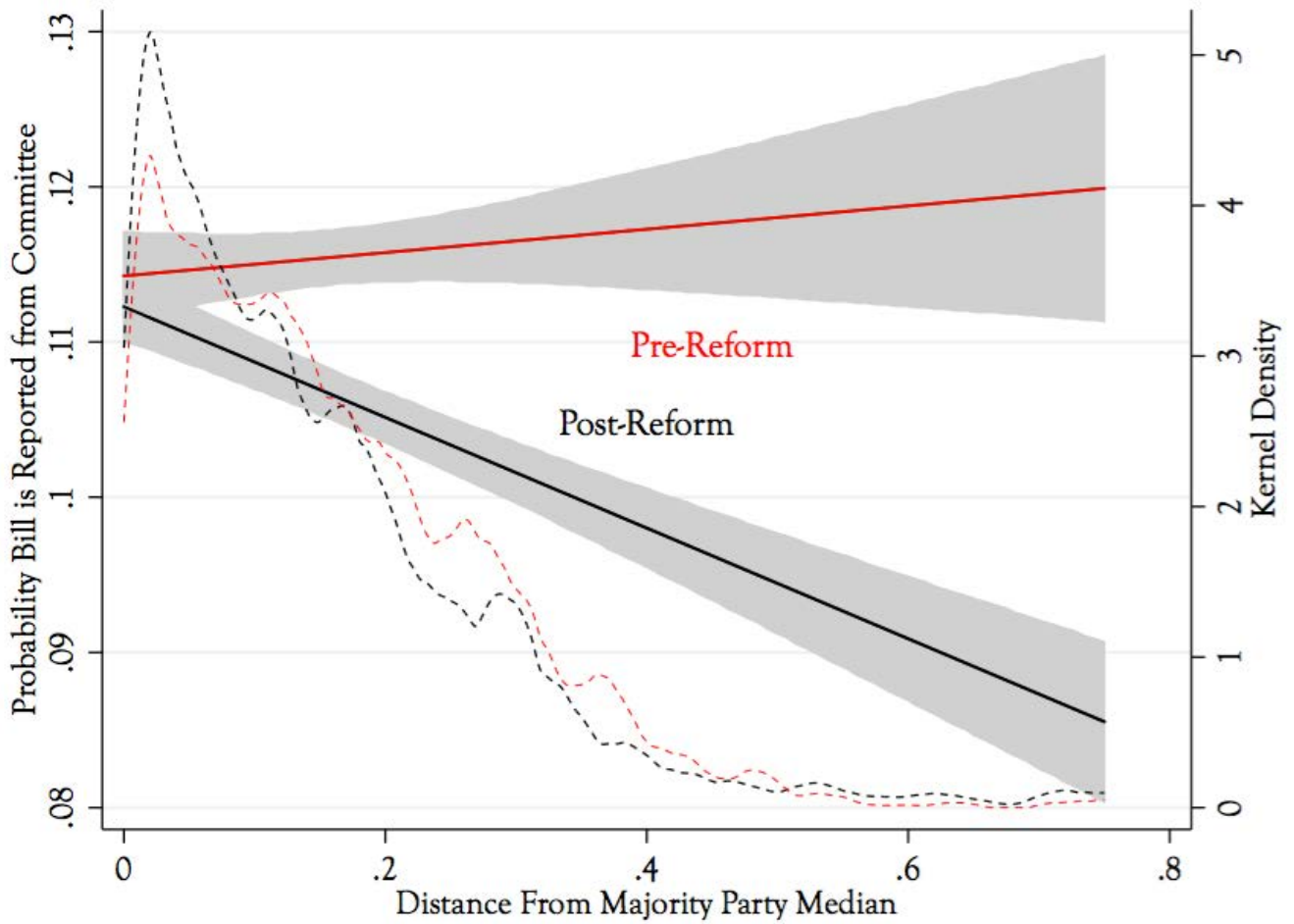


Figure 4 Impact of Committee Discharge Rate Pre-Post Reform Across Distance from Chamber Median (Majority Party Members only)

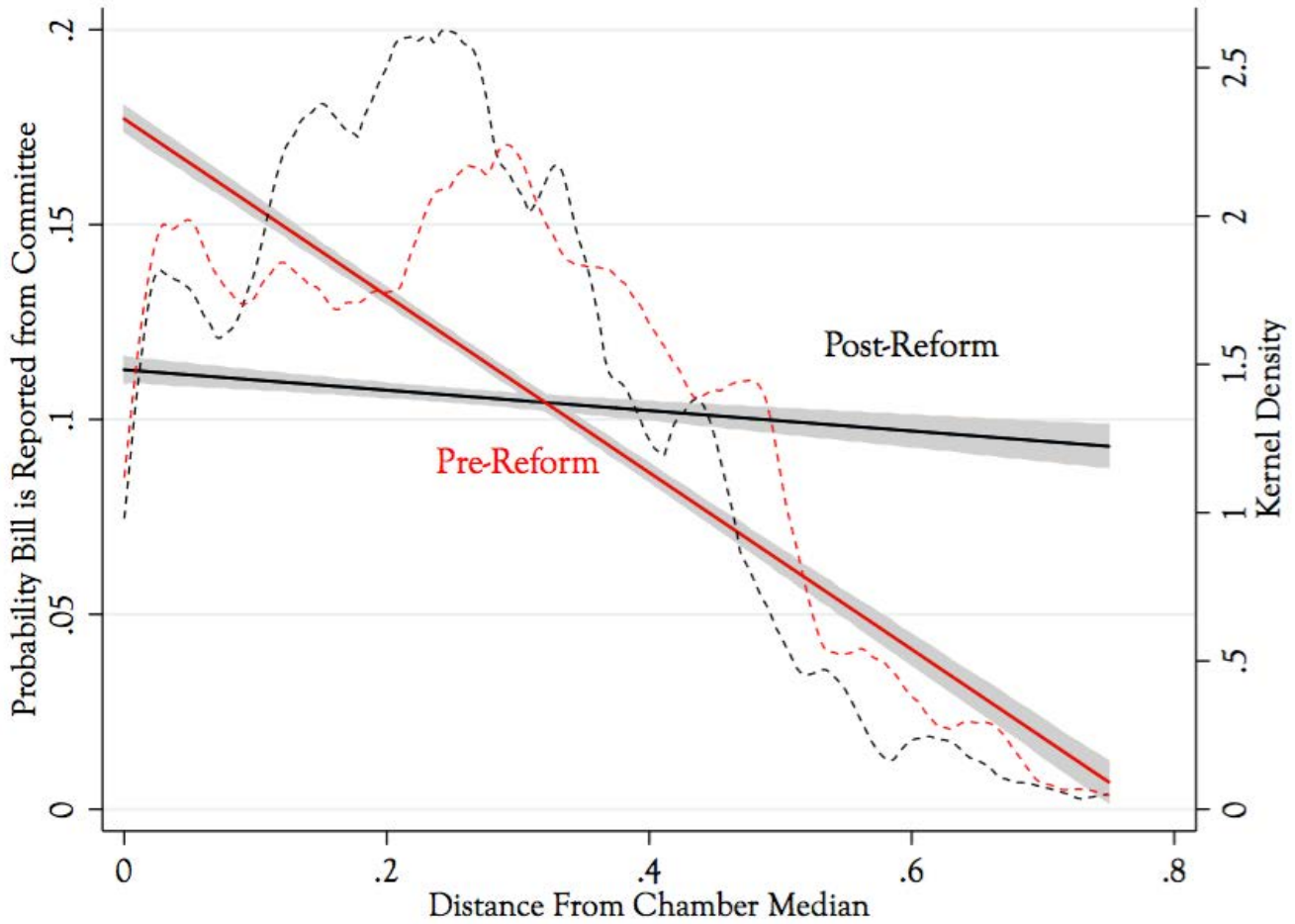


Figure 3 Impact of Previous Election Vote Share Pre-Post Chair Reform

