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Comparing Floor-Dominated and Party-Dominated Explanations of Policy Change in the House of Representatives

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We test two explanations of the legislative process for their ability to account for the ideological pattern of policy change produced by bills enacted by the House of Representatives, 1953–1996. The Floor-Dominated explanation argues that the floor’s median member largely determines legislative outcomes, while the Party-Dominated explanation claims that power for the majority party. We develop three measures of the ideological pattern of policy change and independent variables that reflect the predictions of the two explanations. While we find support for both explanations, the greater significance, both substantively and statistically, of the Party-Dominated explanation leads us to conclude that the House’s agenda-setting process is largely controlled by the majority party.

Scholars have long debated the relative influence of the floor median member and the majority party on the House of Representatives. We derive hypotheses from both theories about the ideological direction in which bills enacted by the House should change policy. We have created a data set for 1953–1996 that locates each enacted bill relative to the status quo policy that it challenges, which enables us to determine the ideological direction of the policy change produced by each bill. We aggregate these bills by year to identify annual patterns in the ideological directions of policy change. We then test each theory’s predictions with these data.

In the first section we present our theoretical framework, describing our assumptions about the House’s legislative process and identifying each theory’s hypotheses about the ideological pattern of policy change. Next, we present three measures of the ideological direction of policy change, as well as our causal and control variables. We then offer our findings. Finally, we reflect on the relative efficacy of the two theories, concluding that the majority party is the most important determinant of the ideological pattern of policy change in the House.

Explaining the Ideological Direction of Policy Change

We base the Floor- and Party-Dominated explanations on a common set of four assumptions. First, there exists a unidimensional ideological scale along which each member, bill, and status quo policy can (in principle) be located. Within that dimension, any status quo policies that are moved the same distance have equal effects on all members' utility.¹ Second, members vote sincerely on the basis of single-peaked preferences. Third, bills are considered under an open rule that permits germane amendments.² Fourth, the legislative process is constrained by the Gridlock Interval (GI) (Krehbiel 1998). The GI consists of the set of status quo policies that legislative rules protect from change. Typically, the president's veto and the Senate's filibuster create two pivotal players whose preferences define a limited set of status quo policies that can be successfully challenged and the ideological location of the set of bills that can be adopted as alternatives to those status quo policies. The veto power enables a president to block a bill when it is more distant from the president's ideal point than the status quo, *if* the president retains the support of at least one-third of the members of either chamber on a veto override motion. Thus, the veto power creates a pivot point at the ideological position of the more ideologically extreme member in either the House or Senate whose support would give the president at least one-third of the votes on a motion to override the veto. By the same logic, the Senate's filibuster power creates a pivot point on the other side of the floor median member (FM). The filibuster gives any senator the ability to block a bill that is more distant from that member's ideal point than is the status quo *if* that member can defeat a vote of cloture. Therefore, the filibuster power creates a pivot point at the position of the member in the Senate whose support for the filibuster would prevent a successful cloture vote.³ No bill challenging a status quo policy within the GI can be enacted. We now review each theory in light of these assumptions to derive a prediction from each about the ideological direction of policy change.

¹ Assuming a unidimensional policy space simplifies our analysis. This imposes a cost in terms of the loss of the real-world complexity that surely exists in the multidimensional politics of the House. With only one relevant policy dimension, moving a status quo policy x units on issue 1 affects each member's utility the same as moving another status quo policy x units on issue 2. Questions of varying issue salience along multiple policy dimensions are not addressed in this model. However, the unidimensional policy space assumption generates two important compensating advantages. First, it allows us to derive simple, testable predictions for both the Floor-Dominated and Party-Dominated explanations of policy outcomes. Second, it enables us to test our Party-Dominated explanation within the constraints of the gridlock interval as defined in Krehbiel's supermajoritarian pivotal politics (1998). Evidence presented in our discussion of the creation of the dependent variables demonstrates the robustness of the unidimensional assumption.

² Closed rules enhance the majority party's influence over legislative outcomes. We should not assume the existence of a power when our purpose is to test for its existence.

³ If the president's ideal point is inside the filibuster point on the same side of FM, then the liberal and conservative filibuster pivot points would define the GI's boundaries.

The Floor-Dominated Explanation of Ideological Policy Change

The Floor-Dominated explanation identifies the floor median member as the privileged actor in the legislative process because our first two assumptions combined with the House's use of majority rule means that a bill must receive FM's support if it is to be enacted. FM uses this power to shape the House's policy decisions.

Maass (1983), Gilligan and Krehbiel (1987, 1989, and 1990), and Krehbiel (1991) endorse the Floor-Dominated explanation. They view Congress as a majoritarian institution that uses committees to provide information and expertise. Krehbiel provides the most formal treatment of this relationship, concluding that the legislature's preferences are essentially identical to those of FM (1991, 101).

The Floor-Dominated explanation's hypotheses are driven by FM's indifference to the ideological direction of policy change. FM maximizes her utility by challenging status quo policies that produce the greatest policy movement toward her ideal point, regardless of whether that movement is in a conservative or liberal direction.⁴ Consequently, the value that FM derives from a bill depends on: (1) the distribution of available status quo policies (Cox 2000) and (2) FM's location within the GI.

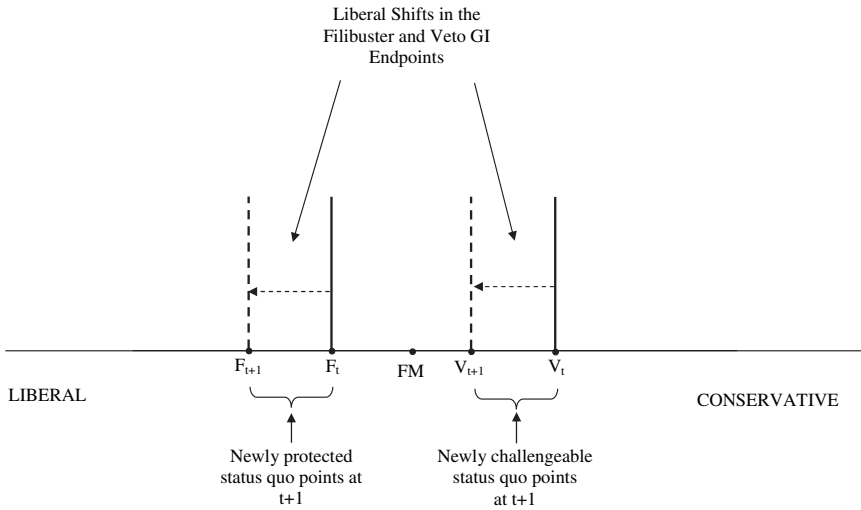
First, since the GI protects from challenge those status quo policies that are located within its boundaries, the distribution of status quo policies available to challenge consists of those located outside the GI's endpoints. We cannot know a priori the initial distribution of these status quo policies. But the Floor-Dominated explanation renders that limitation moot because it claims that FM will propose bills that challenge those status quo policies that are the greatest ideological distance from the GI endpoints. Therefore, regardless of their initial distribution, we can agree with Krehbiel that, in equilibrium, the Floor-Dominated explanation predicts that ideologically extreme status quo policies should be "empirically uncommon" (1998, 36). Under these circumstances, the distribution of status quo policies is largely endogenous to the legislative process, determined by shifts in the GI endpoints. Figure 1 illustrates how changes in the GI endpoints can affect the distribution of status quo policies.

If the GI's liberal endpoint shifts in a liberal direction ($F_{t+1} - F_t$), relatively liberal status quo policies that had been available for challenge in year_t are protected by the new GI and are not susceptible to challenge in year_{t+1}. Similarly, if the conservative endpoint of the GI shifts in a liberal direction ($V_{t+1} - V_t$), relatively conservative status quo policies that had been protected from challenge in year_t become available for challenge in year_{t+1}. Conservative shifts in the GI's endpoints produce comparable increases in the availability of liberal status quo policies for challenge and decreases in the availability of conservative status quo policies for challenge. Thus, our first hypothesis:

⁴ We refer to presidents in the masculine and to members of Congress in the feminine.

FIGURE 1

Effects of Shifts in the Gridlock Interval Endpoints on the Availability of Challengeable Status Quo Points



Hypothesis 1: Liberal change in either GI endpoint should be positively associated with the proportion of liberal policy change and negatively associated with the proportion of conservative policy change.

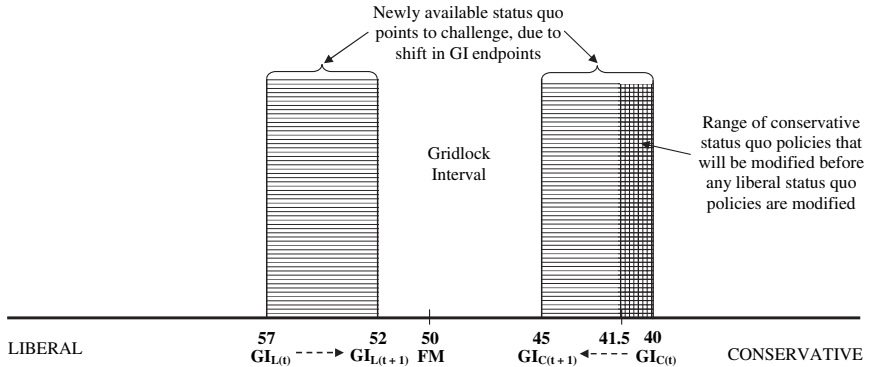
The second factor affecting FM’s decision of which status quo policies to challenge is her location within the GI. Figure 1 implies that FM is located at the midpoint of GI. This renders her indifferent to challenging liberal and conservative status quo policies equidistant from the nearest GI endpoint. Of course FM is not likely to be so situated. She will usually be to the liberal or conservative side of the GI, and that affects the utility that FM receives from challenging liberal and conservative status quo policies.

Figure 2 demonstrates the effect of FM’s location within the GI on her choice of status quo policies to challenge. It provides a model of the ideological scale, containing members, status quo policies, and bills, the location of the GI at year t and year $t+1$, and the location of FM in year $t+1$. FM is skewed to the liberal side of the GI. In year $t+1$, each endpoint of the GI contracts an equal distance from its earlier location, opening an equal amount of policy space to the left and right of the GI containing status quo policies that are newly vulnerable to challenge.

Since FM is a utility maximizer, as she begins to propose bills in year $t+1$, she will focus on status quo policies to the right of the GI. Figure 2 demonstrates why. FM gains ten units of utility from challenging policies located at the most conservative available status quo policy. FM proposes a bill at her ideal point (50)

FIGURE 2

Hypothetical Distribution of a Liberally-Skewed Floor-Dominated Model and Its Effects on Challenged Status Quo Points



to challenge the status quo policy located at 40. The bill passes because the member at $GI_{C(t+1)}$ is indifferent between the bill and the status quo. No status quo policy on the liberal end of the spectrum could yield FM that much utility. FM would propose a bill at her ideal point (50) to challenge the most liberal available status quo policy (57). This would yield her seven units of utility. In figure 2, a liberally-skewed FM would offer bills to change policies at every status quo between 40 and 41.5 before challenging *any* available status quo policies on the liberal side of the GI.⁵ So FM should disproportionately challenge status quo

⁵ In Figure 2, since $GI_{C(t+1)}$ is located at 45, she is indifferent between a status quo policy at 40 and a bill located at 50. Therefore, FM is free to offer a bill at 50 as an alternative to the status quo policy at 40. But to change successfully a status quo policy greater than 40, FM must render her proposal less liberal. If, for example, the status quo policy were located at 41, FM could not get a bill located at 50 enacted. $GI_{C(t+1)}$ would realize that such a bill would be farther from her ideal point than is the status quo policy at 41. Therefore she would prefer the status quo policy to the bill and block its passage. To successfully change a status quo policy at 41, FM must offer a bill at 49 because that point renders $GI_{C(t+1)}$ indifferent between the bill and the status quo policy. FM gains more utility from challenging any of the relatively conservative available status quo to the right of 41.5 than from challenging any of the relatively liberal available status quo policies to the left of FM. Therefore, as long as any of the relatively conservative status quo policies remain available to challenge, FM will not challenge any of the more liberal status quo policies. FM ceases to have this preference for challenging conservative status quo policies at 41.5. At 41.5, FM must offer 48.5 to keep $GI_{C(t+1)}$ indifferent between the status quo and the bill. This movement in policy represents a seven-unit increase in FM's utility ($48.5 - 41.5 = 7$). But at this point, FM can also gain seven units of utility from challenging the most extreme status quo point available to the left of $GI_{L(t+1)}$. FM can successfully challenge the status quo policy at 57 with a bill at 50, because $GI_{L(t+1)}$ will prefer the bill to the status quo. Thus, 41.5 is the point at which FM begins to challenge status quo policies from both sides of the GI because at that point she can no longer gain more utility from liberal policy change than from conservative policy change.

policies outside the GI endpoint that is furthest from her, yielding our second hypothesis.⁶

Hypothesis 2: Liberal skewness of FM within the GI should be positively associated with liberal policy change and negatively associated with conservative policy change.

The Party-Dominated Explanation of Ideological Policy Change

This theory identifies the majority party as the privileged player in the legislative process. Some argue that the majority party's power is relatively invariant (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Cox and McCubbins 1993) while others claim that its power is conditional (Aldrich and Rohde 1998, 2000). But all hold that the advantages associated with majority party status motivate party members to follow their leaders' wishes. The leaders then use the power of the majority to secure policy rewards for their party in the present and to maintain their party's majority status into the indefinite future. A number of studies have identified and tested various predictions about how the Party-Dominated explanation would influence the structure and behavior of various aspects of Congress (Binder 1996, 1997; Cox and McCubbins 1997; Dion 1997; Dion and Huber 1996; Hager and Talbert 2000; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1995; Snyder and Groseclose 2000). However, none has assessed the extent to which the ideological impact of enacted legislation reflects the preferences of the majority party. Cox and McCubbins (2002) come closest to focusing on that question when they demonstrate that the majority party is almost never defeated on the floor of the House. However, their evidence also shows that the minority party is not often defeated either. So while their analyses strongly support their expectations about what should *not* occur if the majority party is dominant, they do not explore the constructive implications for the ideological change in policies that should result if the Party-Dominated explanation is operative.

We begin by noting that our sincere voting and open-rule assumptions prevent the majority party from exercising powers that other versions of the Party-Dominated explanation employ. In our model, the majority party cannot influence its members' voting decisions, so if the majority party supports a bill on the floor that would make a majority of the chamber's members worse off, the bill will fail. Similarly, in our model, the majority party cannot control the amendment process, so even if the majority party opposed an amendment that would make a majority of the chamber's members better off than the original proposal, the amendment would be adopted. Thus, our assumptions mean that the majority party's ability to influence the ideological direction of policy change depends

⁶Once FM begins challenging status quo policies between the 57 and $GI_{L(t+1)}$ and 41.5 and $GI_{C(t+1)}$, FM will challenge more liberal status quo policies than conservative status quo policies, gradually offsetting the initially conservative effect. Appendix A provides a more detailed treatment of the pattern associated with a skewed FM.

on a single power, the agenda-setting power to decide which bills to bring to the floor and which to block from the floor.

The GI limits the majority party's agenda-setting power to deciding whether to challenge status quo policies to the liberal, conservative, or both sides of the GI. Since the party's leaders want to maintain their majority status and not just maximize their party's utility in a single year, they must balance the goal of gaining utility against the goal of maintaining their majority status. They do so by bringing to the floor bills that generate utility gain for the maximum number of party members while imposing utility loss on the minimum number of party members. Since they can only challenge status quo policies outside the GI, the majority party leaders must decide whether challenging status quo policies to the liberal or the conservative side of the GI best accomplishes this goal.

The majority party provides utility to the largest number of its members and imposes utility losses on the smallest number of its members by bringing to the floor bills that challenge status quo policies located to the side of the GI containing fewer party members and blocking from the floor bills that challenge status quo policies located to the side of the GI containing more party members. If the majority party follows this strategy, the result should be a high proportion of enacted bills that shift policy toward the side of the GI with the larger number of majority party members and a low proportion of enacted bills that shift policy away from those members. In all four years of Republican majorities included in our data set, Republicans to the conservative side of the GI far outnumbered Republicans to the liberal side, and in all 40 years of Democratic majorities, Democrats to the liberal side of the GI similarly outnumbered Democrats to the conservative side. This yields our third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: A liberal majority party should be positively associated with liberal policy change and negatively associated with conservative policy change.

Measurement

We first describe two methods for measuring the ideological direction of policy change. We then describe the independent variables used to test the two theories.

The Dependent Variable

Others have studied the ideological character of public policy to investigate important questions about our political system, from the causes of change in civil rights and social welfare legislation (Brady and Sinclair 1984) to the effects of public opinion on the character of public policy (Page and Shapiro 1983; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995). We develop our own policy liberalism measures to test two models of legislative organization in the House of Representatives. We use two methods to create our dependent variables. Each has its own strength and

weakness that, fortunately, offset one another. The first method uses ideologically based opposition. It has strong face validity but is based on only 37% of the bills in our data set. The second method uses the relative liberalism of the supporting and opposing coalitions. It encompasses 95% of those bills but has weaker face validity. So, we first describe our more robust method for measuring the ideological direction of policy change (which produces two separate dependent variables) and show why they are valid measures. We then describe our more encompassing method for measuring the ideological direction of policy change (which produces our third dependent variable) and establish its validity by demonstrating the high correlation between it and the two measures produced by the first method. The comparable results produced by these three measures of ideological policy change raises our confidence in the validity and generality of our findings.

Our first method is based on the ideological character of the bills' opponents. Under a strict application of our assumptions, if the House enacts a bill, then all the members to one side of FM up to and at least including FM must have supported the bill. Opposition could only have come from the side of FM opposite the source of support. Thus, if opposition to an enacted bill comes from the liberal side of the House, then the bill must have moved policy in a conservative direction. If opposition comes from the conservative side, then the bill must have moved policy in a liberal direction. Thus, if our assumptions were sufficiently robust, any ideologically defined measure of opposition would indicate the ideological direction of policy change.

Since assumptions oversimplify, members' votes often violate the assumptions. Some liberals vote with conservatives against other liberals, and vice versa. So members on both sides of FM often oppose the same bill. If we are to use opposition to identify the ideological direction of policy change, we must identify members whose opposition reliably indicates the ideological direction in which an enacted bill moves policy.

We maintain that opposition of the House's most ideologically extreme members offers the most reliable indicator of the ideological direction of policy change. Since ideologically extreme members are at the ends of the dimension, it is unlikely that any bill could be enacted if they opposed it for being too extreme. For example, if the most conservative members oppose a bill because it is too conservative, it is unlikely that less conservative members would support it, so the bill would fail. Thus, bills opposed by the most liberal members move policy in a conservative direction while bills opposed by the most conservative members move policy in a liberal direction.

To identify ideologically extreme opposition we used adjusted Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) scores (Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder 1999) to identify the most liberal quartile (MLQ) and most conservative quartile (MCQ) of members in the House for each year.⁷ We then determined how the members in

⁷ We thank Greg Adams for the Adjusted ADA scores, calculated from the Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder equations. Address requests for Adjusted ADA scores to him.

these quartiles voted on the closest roll-call vote that dealt with the enacted bill in its entirety.⁸ We code a bill as having Liberal Opposition when more than half the members of the MLQ vote against it, and as having Conservative Opposition when more than half the members of the MCQ vote against it. We infer that bills with Liberal Opposition move policy in a conservative direction and bills with Conservative Opposition move policy in a liberal direction.

The validity of our inference rests on the extent to which Liberal Opposition and Conservative Opposition to bills are mutually exclusive characteristics. Bills with both Liberal and Conservative Opposition would invalidate either or both of our assumptions regarding the unidimensionality of the policy space and the sincerity of the members' voting decisions. If the most liberal and the most conservative members oppose a bill, then either there is not a unidimensional policy space, or many members are not voting sincerely. By the same token, the absence of bills with both Liberal and Conservative Opposition would reinforce our confidence in both assumptions and our inference that the presence of opposition indicates policy change away from those opponents.

The actual distribution of bills supports our assumptions and inference. Less than .5% of the bills with Liberal or Conservative Opposition exhibited both, and they were excluded from our analyses. Therefore, we assert that a bill with Liberal Opposition produces conservative policy change and a bill with Conservative Opposition produces liberal policy change. To create our dependent variables, we calculated for each year the percentage of enacted bills that possessed Liberal or Conservative Opposition: Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change and Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change.

While these variables possess strong face validity as measures of liberal and conservative policy change, their generalizability is suspect because they are based on only 37% of the 4,866 bills enacted by the House. The other 63% cannot be classified as producing conservative or liberal policy change for one of two reasons. First, since our method requires opposition to a bill, it cannot classify bills that had such low levels of opposition that neither one-half of the MLQ nor MCQ could have opposed it. As a conservative indicator of this problem, we identified bills enacted with 10% or less opposition and found 2,299 that fit that category. Without sufficient opposition, our method cannot include these bills in its

⁸ We did not use roll-call votes on amendments or rules. They pose at least one of three problems for determining opposition to a bill. First, some amendments try to make a bill so extreme that some of its original supporters will oppose it. If the vote on this "poison pill" amendment is the closest vote, then some opponents to the amendment actually support the bill and do not ideologically represent the opposition. Second, amendments may water down the content of a bill or add obscure provisions to make it more acceptable to the amendment's supporters. Supporters of the bill may oppose this maneuver. If the vote on the amendment is the closest vote, the members who opposed the amendment could actually include bill supporters and so, again, would not ideologically represent the members who ended up opposing the bill. So, votes on amendments do not reliably distinguish a bill's supporters and opponents. Finally, votes on rules generally represent the continuing institutional battles between the parties rather than a contest over the merits of the bill, and so may overestimate majority party effects. Thus, we exclude bills without at least one roll call vote on the overall bill.

calculation. Second, among the 2,567 bills with at least 10% opposition, 765 did not generate Liberal or Conservative Opposition and so could not be classified as creating liberal or conservative policy change. To promote the generalizability of our conclusions, we developed a second method for measuring the ideological direction of policy change.

Our second method compares the mean liberalism of a bill's supporters and opponents. For each bill we calculated the mean Adjusted ADA scores of its supporters and opponents and coded Conservative Win as a "1" when the supporters' mean liberalism was lower than that of the opponents, inferring that the bill moved policy in a conservative direction, "0" otherwise. We aggregated the bills' Conservative Win scores on an annual basis, creating Annual Conservative Win, which measures the percent of bills in each year that moved policy in a conservative direction. The advantage of this measure over our first two is that it encompasses every bill that was not enacted unanimously, which constitute 95% of the bills passed by a roll-call vote during the period of our study.

If members vote according to our assumptions, then Annual Conservative Win must represent the percentage of bills that move policy in a conservative direction. However, if members' votes violate our assumptions, then Annual Conservative Win could include bills that moved policy in a liberal direction and exclude bills that moved policy in a conservative direction. To test the validity of Annual Conservative Win, we correlated it with our first two measures of ideological policy change. High correlations would indicate that they all measure the same phenomena. Annual Conservative Win correlates $-.898$ with Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change and $.945$ with Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change, giving us confidence in Annual Conservative Win.

Measuring the Independent Variables

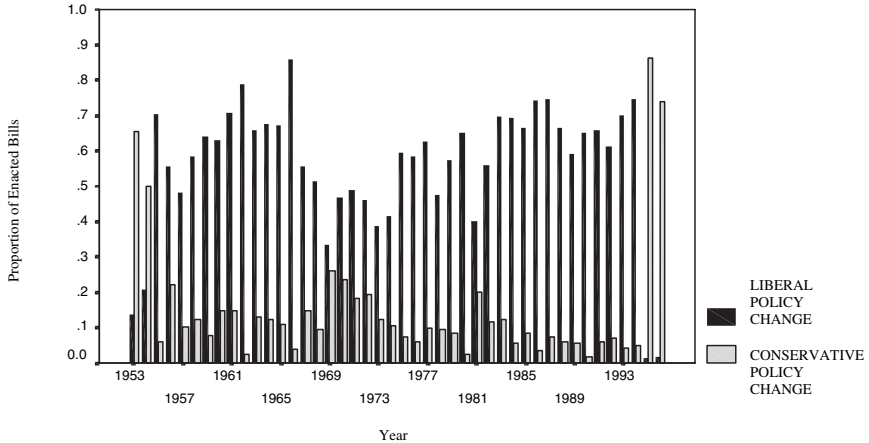
To test the Floor-Dominated explanation's prediction that movement in the GI's endpoints produces policy change, we created two independent variables—Liberal Change in the Liberal GI Endpoint and Liberal Change in the Conservative GI Endpoint—by subtracting each GI endpoint's previous value from its current value. Positive values mean an endpoint moved in a liberal direction. Both variables should be positively associated with liberal policy change and negatively associated with conservative policy change.⁹

The Floor-Dominated explanation predicts an asymmetric pattern of policy change if FM is closer to one end of GI than the other. We measured Liberal Skew in FM by computing $(FM-GI_C) - (GI_L-FM)$ where GI_L and GI_C are the liberal and conservative GI endpoints. The difference shows how much closer FM is to the liberal GI endpoint than to the conservative GI endpoint. Liberal Skew in FM should be positively associated with liberal policy change and negatively associated with conservative policy change.

⁹GI endpoints come from Epstein and O'Halloran's (1999) Appendix E.

FIGURE 3

Rates of Liberal and Conservative Policy Change House of Representatives, 1953–1996



The Party-Dominated explanation’s prediction is based on the majority party’s ideological character. Most Democrats are more liberal than FM and most Republicans are more conservative than FM, so we code Liberal Majority Party “1” for Democratic majorities and “0” for Republican majorities. It should be positively associated with liberal policy change and negatively associated with conservative policy change.

Testing the Two Theories

We begin by testing the two theories’ ability to explain ideological policy change as measured by the presence of liberal or conservative opposition.

Figure 3 presents Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change and Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change in the House of Representatives, 1953–1996.¹⁰ The two are strongly and inversely related ($r = -.885$), with 40 years of low levels of conservative policy change (mean = 10.3%) and high levels of liberal policy change (mean = 60.6%) bracketed by two-year periods of high levels of conservative policy change (mean = 68.9%) and low levels of liberal policy change (mean = 9.5%). How do the Floor-Dominated and Party-Dominated explanations account for those patterns?

¹⁰The patterns of policy change that we report in Figure 3 are similar to those that Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson (1995) report in Figure 4a. In both, liberal policy change peaks in the early- to mid-1960s, dips in the late 1960s-early 1970s, and increases in the mid- to late-1980s while conservative policy change peaks in the early 1970s and the early 1980s. These similarities support our measures’ validity and reliability.

Table 1 presents our findings. The first two columns test the Floor-Dominated theory's predictions. Liberal changes in both GI endpoints and in Liberal Skew in FM are all positively associated with Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change. A 1% increase in each of the variables produces about a .5% increase in Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change. The Floor-Dominated explanation does less well explaining Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change. The direction of the coefficients for all three variables is negative, as predicted, but Liberal Change in the Liberal GI Endpoint is not significant. The substantive impact of the other two variables is similar to their effect on Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change. A 1% increase in each reduces Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change by about .5%. Each equation yields a modest adjusted R^2 (.2954 and .2715).

The second two columns in Table 1 test the Party-Dominated explanation. Liberal Majority Party increases Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change by 56.5% and decreases Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change by 59.5%, with an adjusted R^2 of .6299 and .8313, respectively.

Thus far, we have considered the two theories as mutually exclusive. Yet some claim that each explanation applies to different types of bills (Deering and Smith 1997; Maltzman 1997). Some bills divide along party lines, supporting the Party-Dominated explanation. Other bills split the parties, strengthening the Floor-Dominated explanation. We have no nontautological method for determining the proportions of the two types of bills that might occur. However, if bills of both types were enacted, we should find support for both theories. To test this, the last two columns in Table 1 combine the three Floor-Dominated independent variables with the Liberal Majority Party variable from the Party-Dominated explanation. The equations support both theories, generating greater explanatory power than either one alone. The disparities in the magnitude and statistical significance of the b-coefficients suggest that the Party-Dominated explanation is more important in determining ideological direction of policy change.

Table 2 compares the magnitude of the effects associated with each explanation by identifying the maximum and mean effects of each theory¹¹ on both Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change and Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change.¹²

A Liberal Majority Party increases the percentage of bills producing liberal policy change by 47.29% and reduces the percentage of bills producing conservative policy change by 53.5%. The maximum effects of the three Floor-Dominated explanation variables, combined, increase liberal policy change by 37.02% and decrease conservative policy change by 18.94%. The Floor-Dominated effects are only hypothetical since maximum values are never

¹¹ Liberal Majority Party's mean and maximum effects are equivalent.

¹² Maximum effects consist of the difference between the most liberal and most conservative value of each GI endpoint and for Liberal Skew in FM: 37.4, 34.6, and 65.6, respectively. The mean differences were 5.07, 4.61, and -.268, respectively. We calculate effects by multiplying those values by the corresponding b-coefficients in the last two columns of Table 1.

TABLE 1
 Three Explanations of the Ideological Patterns of Policy Change, House of Representatives, 1953–1996[#]

| | Floor-Dominated Explanation | | | Party-Dominated Explanation | | | Combined Explanation | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| | Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change | Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change | Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change | Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change | Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change | Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change | Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change | Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change | |
| Constant | .5415*** (.0420) | .1780*** (.0435) | .0470 (.0661) | .6978*** (.0400) | .1270* (.0622) | .6443*** (.0348) | | | |
| Liberal Change in the Liberal GI Endpoint | .0042* (.0024) | -.0039 (.0024) | — | — | .0034* (.0017) | -.0016 (.0013) | | | |
| Liberal Change in the Conservative GI Endpoint | .0061** (.0025) | -.0061** (.0025) | — | — | .0038* (.0016) | -.0036** (.0012) | | | |
| Liberal Skew in FM | .0048** (.0015) | -.0046** (.0016) | — | — | .0017 (.0011) | -.0016** (.0006) | | | |
| Liberal Majority Party | — | — | .5651*** (.0672) | -.5952*** (.0418) | .4729*** (.0646) | -.5350*** (.0368) | | | |
| Adjusted R ² | .2954 | .2715 | .6299 | .8313 | .7055 | .8836 | | | |
| N = 44 | | | | | | | | | |

Figures in parentheses are standard errors. * indicates significance at the .05 level (one-tailed), ** indicates significance at the .01 level (one-tailed), *** indicates significance at the .001 level (one-tailed).

[#] The Durbin-Watson statistics for the original OLS equations indicated that a significant level of autocorrelation was present. Therefore, we transformed these equations, using an iterated Prais-Winsten estimated generalized least-squares correction (nlag = 2). The subsequent critical Durbin-Watson statistics for the transformed equations did not indicate significant autocorrelation.

TABLE 2

Impact of Floor-Dominated and Party-Dominated Explanations on
 Liberal and Conservative Policy Change—Combined Explanation
 House of Representatives, 1953–1996

| | Annual Percent Liberal Policy Change | Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change |
|---|---|--|
| <i>Maximum Effects:</i> | | |
| Liberal Change in the Liberal GI Endpoint | .1272 | -.0598 |
| Liberal Change in the Conservative GI Endpoint | .1315 | -.1246 |
| Liberal Skew in FM | .1115 | -.005 |
| <i>Mean Effects:</i> | | |
| Liberal Change in the Liberal GI Endpoint | .0157 | -.0061 |
| Liberal Change in the Conservative GI Endpoint | .0157 | -.0157 |
| Liberal Skew in FM | -.0005 | .0004 |
| Liberal Majority Party* | .4729 | -.5350 |

Maximum effects are calculated by multiplying each independent variable's b-coefficient times the difference between that variable's most liberal and most conservative values. Mean effects are calculated by multiplying each independent variable's b-coefficient times that variable's mean value.

* Since Liberal Majority Party is a dichotomous variable, its maximum and mean effects are the same.

followed by minimum values. The mean effects offer a better sense of the relative effects of the two explanations.

The mean effects of the Floor-Dominated explanation variables are much smaller, raising liberal policy change by 3.09% and reducing conservative policy change by 2.14%.¹³ While both theories find support, the Party-Dominated explanation clearly has the greater effect. We turn now to testing the two explanations with our second, more encompassing measure of the ideological pattern of policy change based on the relative liberalism of the bills' supporters and opponents.

Figure 4 provides visual confirmation of how closely Annual Conservative Win corresponds to Figure 3's Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change. The annual rate of conservative victories in the bracketing years of 1953–54 and 1995–96 averages 73.7% and plunges to 19.3% in the intervening years of 1955–1994.

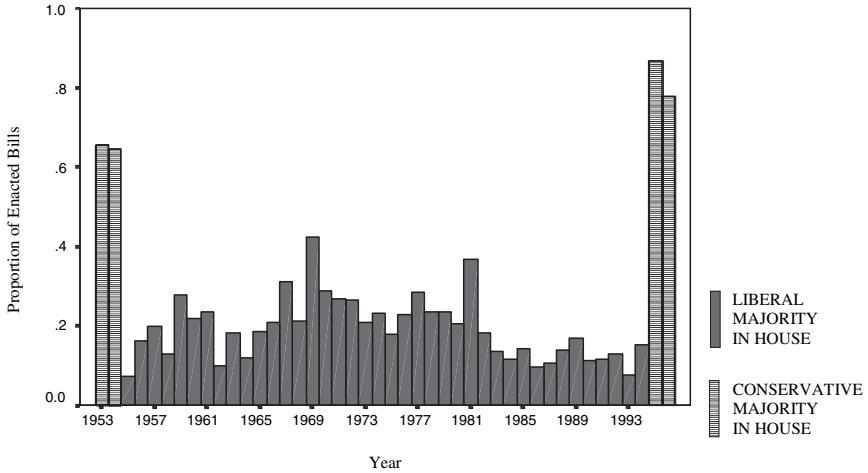
The independent variables for both explanations should all be negatively associated with Annual Conservative Win. Table 3 presents the evidence.

Both explanations' effects of the ideological pattern of policy change for this more encompassing measure are comparable to those produced for Annual

¹³ Liberal Skew in FM's mean effect on both dependent variables is opposite that predicted because, as endnote 12 reveals, its mean value is actually negative, meaning that, on average, FM was skewed in a slightly conservative direction.

FIGURE 4

Patterns of Conservative Policy Change
House of Representatives, 1953–1996



Percent Conservative Policy Change. In the Floor-Dominated model, Liberal Change in the Conservative GI Endpoint and Liberal Skew in FM are statistically significant, with similar substantive effects, and an adjusted R^2 of .2834. In the Party-Dominated model, Liberal Majority Party reduces Annual Conservative Win by almost 60% with an adjusted R^2 of .8204, similar to its effect on Annual Percent Conservative Policy Change.

The last column shows that the two explanations combined do a better job of accounting for Annual Conservative Wins than either does alone. The same three independent variables are significant and yield an adjusted R^2 of .8987.

The effects of the Floor-Dominated and Party-Dominated explanations are reported in Table 4. The combined maximum effect of the Floor-Dominated model's variables reduces Annual Conservative Win by 36.62%. The mean combined effect reduces Annual Conservative Win by 2.64%. The presence of a Liberal Majority Party decreases Annual Conservative Win by 49.14%. While the Floor-Dominated explanation's causal variables have a significant impact, they are again overshadowed by the effect of the Party-Dominated explanation.

The Floor-Dominated and Party-Dominated explanations' predictions suggest one final test of their relative importance. The Floor-Dominated explanation says Liberal Skew in FM should be positively associated with liberal policy change and negatively associated with conservative policy change. The Party-Dominated explanation says a Liberal Majority Party should be positively associated with liberal policy change. Thus, when FM is skewed toward the conservative GI endpoint with a Liberal Majority Party, the Floor-Dominated explanation predicts conservative policy change while the Party-Dominated explanation predicts

TABLE 3

Explaining Annual Conservative Win: Floor-Dominated,
Party-Dominated, and Combined Explanations
House of Representatives, 1953–1996[#]

| | Floor-Dominated Explanation | Party-Dominated Explanation | Combined Explanation |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Annual Conservative Win | Annual Conservative Win | Annual Conservative Win |
| Constant | .2477*** (.0313) | .7760*** (.0447) | .6886*** (.0326) |
| Liberal Change in the Liberal GI Endpoint | -.0021 (.0025) | — | -.0018 (.0012) |
| Liberal Change in the Conservative GI Endpoint | -.0055* (.0026) | — | -.0039*** (.0012) |
| Liberal Skew in FM | -.0055*** (.0015) | — | -.0025*** (.0006) |
| Liberal Majority Party | — | -.5934*** (.0437) | -.4914*** (.0343) |
| Adjusted R ² N = 44 | .2834 | .8204 | .8987 |

Figures in parentheses are standard errors. * indicates significance at the .05 level (one-tailed), ** indicates significance at the .01 level (one-tailed), *** indicates significance at the .001 level (one-tailed).

[#]The Durbin-Watson statistics for the original OLS equations indicated that a significant level of autocorrelation was present. Therefore, we transformed these equations, using an iterated Prais-Winsten estimated generalized least-squares correction (nlag = 2). The subsequent critical Durbin-Watson statistics for the transformed equations did not indicate significant autocorrelation.

liberal policy change. In every one of the 20 years in which that situation occurred, the Party-Dominated explanation prevailed.

Conclusions

This research was undertaken to evaluate the relative efficacy of two competing theories of the legislative process: the Floor-Dominated (Krehbiel 1991, 1998) and Party-Dominated (Cox and McCubbins 1993) explanations. Each explanation generated distinctive predictions regarding the ideological pattern of policy change that should be produced by bills enacted by the House of Representatives. While both explanations generated nontrivial effects, our analyses all led to the same conclusion: the majority party has the preponderant effect on the ideological direction of policy change.

TABLE 4

Impact of Floor-Dominated and Party-Dominated Explanations on Conservative Win Rate, House of Representatives, 1953–1996

| | Annual Conservative Win |
|--|-------------------------|
| <i>Maximum Effects:</i> | |
| Liberal Change in the Liberal GI Endpoint | -.0673 |
| Liberal Change in the Conservative GI Endpoint | -.1349 |
| Liberal Skew in FM | -.1640 |
| <i>Mean Effects:</i> | |
| Liberal Change in the Liberal GI Endpoint | -.0091 |
| Liberal Change in the Conservative GI Endpoint | -.0180 |
| Liberal Skew in FM | .0007 |
| Liberal Majority Party* | -.4914 |

Maximum effects are calculated by multiplying each independent variable's b-coefficient times the difference between that variable's most liberal and most conservative values. Mean effects are calculated by multiplying each independent variable's b-coefficient times that variable's mean value.

*Since Liberal Majority Party is a dichotomous variable, its maximum and mean effects are the same.

This conclusion can help evaluate past research and provide direction for future work. First, by demonstrating that legislative outcomes have a strong foundation in majority party power, our study lends credence to studies that claim the majority party determines various institutional rules (Binder 1997; Dion 1997; Dion and Huber 1996). Critics of these studies (Krehbiel 1997; Schickler and Rich 1997) dispute the party-based motivation for such rules, claiming that they could have been the product of floor-based majorities. One way to judge whether these rules had partisan motivations is to consider their consequences: do the legislative outcomes reflect the preferences of the majority party or of the floor median member? Our study supports the claim that these rules were motivated by the majority party by showing that the majority party is heavily advantaged by the legislative outcomes that those rules helped produce.

Second, our study offers suggestions for future research. If the majority party does exercise a preponderant influence on legislative outcomes, what factors affect the degree of that influence? Cox and McCubbins (1993) argue that the majority party acts like a cartel, enabling it to exercise a relatively constant level of influence. In contrast, Aldrich and Rohde (2000) suggest that the majority party's influence is conditional, varying with the level of ideological polarization between the parties. In a similar vein, we suspect that majority party influence over the ideological content of enacted legislation is also affected by extrainstitutional factors, such as which party has control of the other chamber and the presidency. In future studies, we will use variations in the rates of liberal and conservative policy change to address such questions.

Appendix A

We identify FM's sequence for challenging status quo policies in Figure 2, assuming those status quo policies are uniformly distributed.

FM'S UTILITY GAINS FOR FIGURE 2

| Choice | Location of SQ _L | Location of Bill _L | Utility from Bill _L | Utility from Bill _C | Location of Bill _C | Location of SQ _C |
|--------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | | | | 10.00 | 50.00 | 40.00 |
| 2 | | | | 9.50 | 49.75 | 40.25 |
| 3 | | | | 9.00 | 49.50 | 40.50 |
| 4 | | | | 8.50 | 49.25 | 40.75 |
| 5 | | | | 8.00 | 49.00 | 41.00 |
| 6 | | | | 7.50 | 48.75 | 41.25 |
| 7&8* | 57.00 | 50.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 48.50 | 41.50 |
| 9 | 56.75 | 50.00 | 6.75 | | | |
| 10&11* | 56.50 | 50.00 | 6.50 | 6.50 | 48.25 | 41.75 |
| 12 | 56.25 | 50.00 | 6.25 | | | |
| 13&14* | 56.00 | 50.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 | 48.00 | 42.00 |
| 15 | 55.75 | 50.00 | 5.75 | | | |
| 16&17* | 55.50 | 50.00 | 5.50 | 5.50 | 47.75 | 42.25 |
| 18 | 55.25 | 50.00 | 5.25 | | | |
| 19&20* | 55.00 | 50.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 47.50 | 42.50 |
| 21 | 54.75 | 50.00 | 4.75 | | | |
| 22&23* | 54.50 | 50.00 | 4.50 | 4.50 | 47.25 | 42.75 |
| 24 | 54.25 | 50.00 | 4.25 | | | |
| 25&26* | 54.00 | 50.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 47.00 | 43.00 |
| 27&28* | 53.75 | 50.25 | 3.50 | 3.50 | 46.75 | 43.25 |
| 29&30* | 53.50 | 50.50 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 46.50 | 43.50 |
| 31&32* | 53.25 | 50.75 | 2.50 | 2.50 | 46.25 | 43.75 |
| 33&34* | 53.00 | 51.00 | 2.00 | 2.00 | 46.00 | 44.00 |
| 35&36* | 52.75 | 51.25 | 1.50 | 1.50 | 45.75 | 44.25 |
| 37&38* | 52.50 | 51.50 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 45.50 | 44.50 |
| 39&40* | 52.25 | 51.75 | 0.50 | 0.50 | 45.25 | 44.75 |
| 41 | 52.00 | 52.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 45.00 | 45.00 |

FM exclusively attacks conservative status quo policies

FM attacks two liberal status quo policies for every one conservative status quo policy

FM attacks liberal status quo policies and conservative status quo policies equally

Since FM is a utility maximizer, when two status quo policies generate the same utility gain, FM should randomly choose which of the two to challenge first.

FM's position to the left of the GI induces a sequence of four behaviors. First, she challenges only status quo policies less than 41.5 because they give her the greatest utility gains. Second, once 41.5 is the most conservative status quo policy left to challenge, FM challenges liberal status quo policies twice as often as conservative ones. The change in utility that FM gains from challenging adjacent liberal status quo policies is -1 , while it is -2 for conservative status quo policies. Therefore, for all status quo policies between 57 and 54 and between 41.5 and 43, FM will challenge two liberal status quo policies for every conservative one. Third, when FM has challenged all status quo policies greater than 54 and less than 43, she challenges conservative and liberal status quo policies equally because she gains the same utility from both. So she challenges equally from both sides of the GI until all available status quo policies are exhausted. Finally, she stops challenging status quo policies because they are protected by the GI.

A legislature could enact sufficient policy change to overwhelm the initial asymmetry in the pattern of policy change produced by a skewed FM, but not until it had challenged a substantial number of status quo points (through Choice 23, which constitutes more than one-half of the set of available status quo policies in our example). Therefore, we expect it to generally be the case that when FM is closer to one side of the GI (e.g., more liberal), the legislature should produce a pattern that favors policy change toward that side of the GI (e.g., more liberal policy change).

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