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# INVESTIGATING THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL COMPROMISE

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ABSTRACT

Using data on party representation for the Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means Committees from the 47th–103rd Congresses, I test the implications of a recently developed theory by Dixit, Grossman, and Gul. Their theory predicts that, in any particular Congress, majority and minority party representation on committees should be a function of the maximum political strength enjoyed by the majority party during the entire period for which it has held majority status up to, and including, that Congress. I refute this hypothesis and find that for any given Congress, majority party representation on committees is determined, rather, by the current political strength of the majority party. These findings speak to broad questions about our understanding of the role of the minority party in legislative organization and lawmaking in legislative politics, and in the US Congress, in particular.

KEY WORDS • bargaining • committees • legislative organization • parties

The role of minority parties in legislative organization and the production of policy outputs is a chronically understudied topic in the American politics literature. Existing scholarship has either generally ignored the role of the minority party in legislative politics, or implicitly assumed that the minority party is inherently weaker than the majority party, and ineffectual in realizing its policy goals. Such neglect seems troublesome given that, in the US Congress, the minority party is not systematically shut out of the political process, as much of the scholarship would indicate. Members of the minority party consistently acquire a nontrivial proportion of committee seats; and their votes are often necessary to ensure passage of legislation deemed valuable to the majority party's interest.

On a similar note, Dixit, Grossman and Gul (2000) recently argue that 'violent swings in policy are rarely observed in democratic politics' (p. 531). When a new party (democratically) comes to power, it will often provide valuable offerings to the minority, such as striving to 'make policy by consensus and consultation' and 'giving it significant representation on legislative committees' (p. 532). Yet despite the pervasive finding of minority party involvement in legislative organization and lawmaking, we are at a loss for

having a well-articulated theory that provides succinct explanations for the following questions. First, why does the minority party receive anything that is deemed valuable to the majority party; and second, what determines or influences the variation observed in the portion of goods allocated to the minority party by the majority?

To understand how and why the majority party allocates benefits to the minority party, Dixit, Grossman and Gul have developed an analytically elegant 'theory of political compromise'. Their theory captures the effects of electoral strength (and electoral uncertainty) on the division of spoils between majority and minority parties, and provides a rationale for why we consistently observe majorities allocating benefits to the minority party, even though they are under no procedural obligation to do so. Such a theory is a significant advance in a literature that has been largely silent on such questions.[1]

Furthermore, Dixit, Grossman and Gul's model has come to serve as a reference point for other scholars investigating a wide array of questions ranging from electoral competition (Lagerlof, 2003), bicameralism and fiscal policy (Bradbury and Crain, 2002), the effects of supermajoritarian institutions on fiscal policy (Bradbury and Johnson, 2003), and the role of political institutions in Argentina (Spiller and Tommasi, 2003). Hence, beyond speaking to the narrow question of the role of minority parties in legislative organization, Dixit, Grossman and Gul's model seems to be widely applicable to a variety of political phenomena. These positives aside, however, as demonstrated below, their theory does not withstand scrutiny when considering the most straightforward test of its implications in the American politics context. Hence, we are still in need of a theory that addresses the stylized facts noted above.

## I. Theory

Dixit, Grossman and Gul's (hereafter DGG) theory of political compromise effectively captures the uncertainty associated with the electoral process on legislative bargaining between parties. To briefly summarize, DGG assume that in each period (for an infinite sequence of dates) there are two parties (Party 1 and Party 2) that divide a pie of size 1. Parties' utilities are a function

1. This is not to say that no scholarship has focused on the role of the minority party in the US Congress. Jones' (1970) study of the Republican Party, for example, serves as a benchmark for studies in this area. The point remains, however, that the bulk of the political science literature has been unable to advance any logically consistent theory for why we should expect to see any explicit, or tacit, cooperation between the majority and minority parties.

of the portion of the pie that they receive, the parties share a common discount factor, and each party seeks to maximize the present discounted values of their utilities.

The division of the pie is determined by which party is 'in power'. More formally, the authors assume that there are a finite number of possible states of the political system, where each state denotes the political 'strength' of each of the two parties, and by definition, which party has the right to determine the division of the pie. For those states in which Party 1 is in power, Party 1 decides how to split the pie, and the converse holds for those states in which Party 2 is in power. (No bargaining ensues between the parties following the realization of the state.) An exogenous Markov process guides the transitions of the political system from one state to the next between periods. So, in any given period, a party is determined to be the party-in-power (as well as its level of political strength), and then that party decides how much of the pie to keep, and how much to give to the out-of-power party. The out-of-power party does nothing until a state occurs whereby it becomes the party-in-power.

Given this parsimonious set-up, the authors characterize the set of efficient subgame-perfect equilibria. Across all states, equilibrium allocations have the quality that the majority party is indifferent between cooperating (giving something to the minority) and not cooperating (snatching all of the goodies for itself) if the state in question was identical to what the majority party faced under the initial allocation. Two implications follow from this result. First, regardless of the initial allocations of political strength, the majority party will always allocate some portion of the pie to the minority party. Hence, one should always observe some degree of cooperation between parties. Second, the majority party's share of the pie never decreases from its original allocation while it maintains majority status. To the extent that the majority's share changes, it will only increase. The actual rate at which the majority party's share increases, however, cannot be predicted based solely on the authors' characterization of the efficient equilibrium. The derivation of any comparative statics predictions requires auxiliary assumptions being made about the transition between states of political strength.

To explore some more refined implications of their model, then, the authors consider equilibria that arise when the state variable follows a generalized random walk process. More specifically, for any given state $k$ that determines the political strengths of parties 1 and 2, DGG assume that the political system can change in only three ways between periods. It can move to state $(k-1)$, which favors Party 1 more (assuming lower states favor Party 1), move to state $(k+1)$, which favors Party 2 more, or not change at all (and stay in state $k$). By allowing the state variable to

follow a generalized random walk process, the authors can create a complete ordering of the pie division that follows from the realization of each state.

To illustrate the policy dynamics that follow from their model, DGG equate each state $k$ with different shares of the popular vote. In other words, for states where $k \leq m$, Party 1 receives greater than 50 percent of the vote and is in the majority. Conversely, for states where $k \geq m+1$, Party 2 is in the majority. Given this operationalization, the results of their model imply the following dynamic should be observed: for any given state where Party 1 is in power (e.g. $k = m-2$ in period 1), as the size of that party's majority increases between periods (e.g. $k = m-3$ in period 2) so, too, should its share of the pie. Conversely, as the size of that party's majority decreases between periods (e.g. $k = m-2$ in period 3), the pie division will remain fixed at what it was in the period where the party in power had its largest majority. The only time the majority party experiences a decrease in its pie allocation is when it loses its majority status, and finds itself in the minority. Considering the relationship between majority size and pie allocations then, the authors note (p. 545):

> . . . policy evolves as the turnings of a ratchet: it shifts in favor of the party in power whenever that party attains a new largest majority since its last time in the minority and remains unchanged as a party's support recedes, or when its gains serve only to restore recent losses.

If one equates (as the authors do in their introduction) the figurative pie being divided with the pool of committee assignments, Figure 1 provides an illustration of the relationship we should observe between the proportion of seats the majority party holds in a (hypothetical) House and what it holds on the committee.[2] The bottom line is a hypothetical House seat proportion enjoyed by the majority party between periods 1–13, while the top line is the corresponding committee seat proportion that the majority party should enjoy if DGG's theory is accurate. The dashed vertical line at period 9 indicates a regime break, in that the party that was in the majority in periods 1–8 (Party 1) is now in the minority.

Consistent with DGG's ratcheting prediction, we would expect to see the proportion of committee seats held by the majority party (hereafter referred to as *majority committee proportion*) to monotonically increase with the proportion of seats it holds in the House (hereafter referred to as *majority House*

2. Concerns might be raised that committee assignments do not appropriately capture the figurative pie being divided in DGG's model. Two defenses are offered for this operationalization. First, DGG themselves note that committee seats might be viewed as post-election spoils to be divided. Second, there are numerous studies in political science that have identified (or taken for granted) the valuable nature of committee seats, both to individual members, and in the context of lawmaking (e.g. Cox and McCubbins, 1997; Schickler and Rich, 1997; Shepsle, 1978).

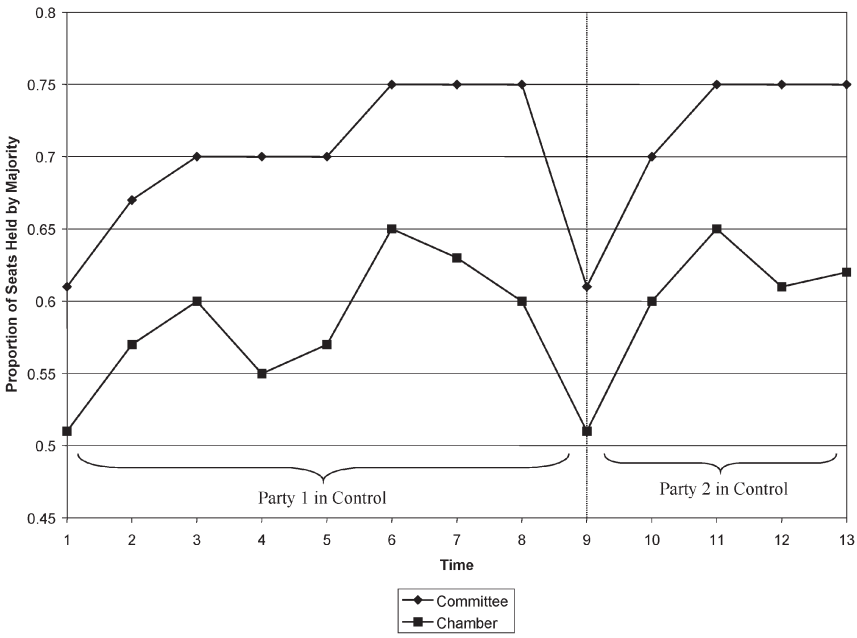


**Figure 1.** Hypothesized Relationship Between Majority Party Representation in Chamber and Committee

*proportion*) only when the majority House proportion reaches a new intra-regime maximum. Hence, as the majority House proportion increases from 51 percent to 57 percent to 60 percent, so too might the majority committee proportion increase from 61 percent to 67 percent to 70 percent.[3] When there is a decrease in the majority House proportion within a regime, however, the majority committee proportion would not decrease accordingly, but rather would stay at the level that corresponded to the previous intra-regime maximum. So, when the majority House proportion decreases in period 4, the majority committee proportion remains stable at 70 percent, and stays at that plateau until the majority House proportion achieves a new intra-regime maximum of 65 percent during period 6. Finally, notice how the majority committee proportion does not decrease unless there is a regime break (in period 9), at which point it decreases to the level that corresponds to the new intra-regime maximum for majority House proportion (51 percent), and the cycle begins anew.

3. This specific mapping from House proportion into committee proportion is selected for illustrative purposes only. Dixit, Grossman and Gul do not specify the functional form that translates majority strength into pie-share.

While this leveling off of policy/committee assignments seems sensible in the context of the model, the lack of a monotonic correspondence between political strength and political spoils might seem counterintuitive in the context of real-world politics.[4] The authors identify some cases as support for their model, noting, for example, the stickiness of patronage allocations in Mexico that remain at a certain level despite decreases in the majority party's strength. While such a case obviously supports their model, DGG readily admit that it does not constitute a robust test of the theory.[5] Given the specificity of their model, however, it lends itself very nicely to large-sample empirical testing.

## II. Data

In testing DGG's model I analyze committee assignment decisions for the House Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means Committees from 1881–1994 (47th–103rd Congress). More specifically, this paper seeks to assess whether the following predictions of DGG hold. First, is it the case that the majority party never experiences decreases in committee representation from their original seat allocation upon acquiring majority status? Second, is the more refined prediction of their model true, that the primary determinant in majority party representation on committees is not 'the majority party's current electoral strength, but the maximum political support it has enjoyed in its whole current stint in power' (Dixit et al., 2000: 546)?[6]

I focus on these three committees rather than all House committees for several reasons. First, Rules, Ways and Means, and Appropriations have conventionally been identified as 'power committees' (Fenno, 1973). Hence, if there were one area for which we would most likely expect to see contentious issues over the division of committee spoils it would be on these three committees. The high values anecdotally attributed to these committees have also been supported empirically by considering committee value

4. The stickiness in policy allocations effectively follows from the parties' risk aversion. Because the parties' utilities are strictly concave, it can never be the case that for periods ($t$) and ($t+1$), the allocation to Party 1 is lower in period ($t+1$) than in period ($t$) (assuming no switch in party control) under an efficient division rule. If such divisions occurred, it would be possible to smooth allocations across the two periods in such a way as to raise both parties' expected utilities in periods ($t$) and ($t+1$) without violating either party's incentive constraint.

5. Alternatively, one might argue that the stickiness in patronage appointments might be due to client politics (Wilson, 1980) wherein political appointees have created a constituency that reinforces the new status quo.

6. It goes without saying that a fundamental prediction of their model, that the minority party always receives some portion of the pie, obviously holds.

estimates derived by analyzing committee transfer patterns over long periods of congressional history.[7]

Second, it is well documented in the congressional politics literature that the proportion of seats held by the majority party for almost all committees is nearly identical to the House majority-minority partisan breakdown (Krehbiel, 1993; Ray and Smith, 1984). To the extent that the majority party is ever over-represented on committees, it occurs on the more valuable, or procedurally oriented, committees such as Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means (Aldrich and Rohde, 2000; Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1991; Stewart, 2001).[8] If we hope to find systematic support for DGG's theory then, it would likely follow from considering committee representation on these three highly valued, historically majority-slanted committees, which obviously do not reflect a perfect mapping from House party proportions to committee party proportions.

## III. Findings

To test DGG's theory, I begin by comparing how the majority committee proportion on the Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means committees respond to changes in the majority House proportion. To illustrate this correspondence, Figures 2, 3 and 4 plot the majority committee proportion for the Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means committees (respectively) as well as the majority House proportion, and a variable called DGG Determinant for the 47th–103rd Congress. The DGG Determinant variable is what Dixit, Grossman, and Gul argue should be the determinant of the majority committee proportion if the state variable follows a random walk process – the largest majority House proportion enjoyed by the majority party during its current stint in control of the House, up to and including the current Congress. The vertical dotted lines in the graph represent regime changes; that is, when the majority party in the House changed from Republican to Democratic (or vice versa).

7. Groseclose and Stewart (1998) develop a technique for estimating the cardinal values of committee seats. Their analysis of transfer patterns in the US House during the years 1947–91 confirms the high values conventionally attributed to these three committees. Incorporating their technique on an earlier dataset, Krehbiel and Wiseman (2001) derive committee estimates for the 19th century House, which also demonstrates the high values associated with these committees.

8. Stewart (2001: 292) notes, for example that 'Ever since the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, the parties have been able [to allocate] a disproportionate share of seats on the most powerful committees, such as Ways and Means.'

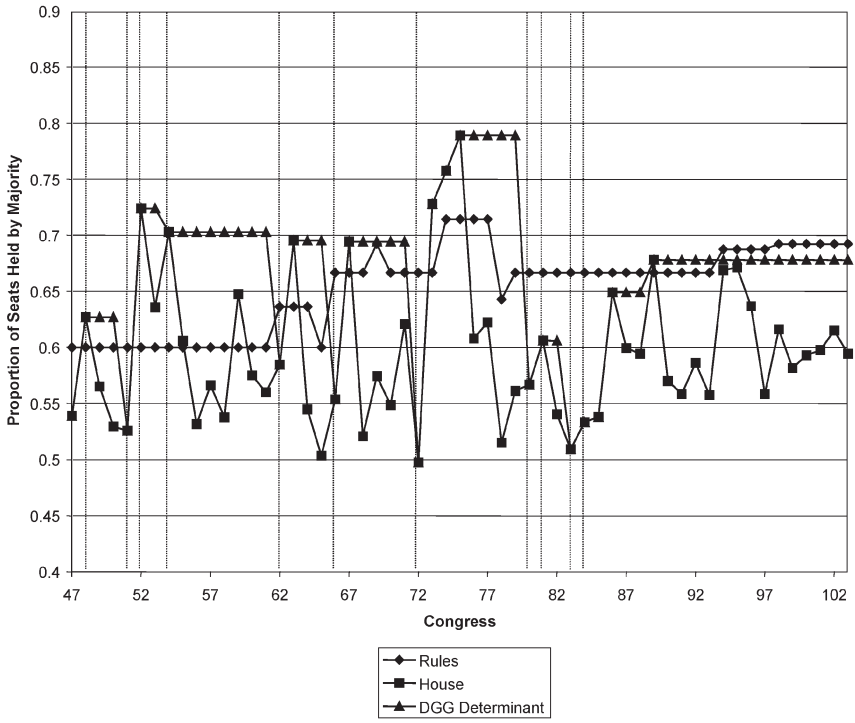


**Figure 2.** Majority Rules Committee and House Proportions (47th–103rd Congresses)

A quick inspection of the graphs does not offer strong support for DGG's model. Simply put, if DGG's basic theory of political compromise is accurate, then within regimes, we should never expect the majority committee proportion to decrease. As noted above, any changes in the majority committee proportion should be positive, and upon achieving a new intra-regime peak, the majority committee proportion should not decrease from the new peak. Across committees, Congresses, and regimes, such a pattern does not consistently hold for any committee, and it holds particularly poorly for the Appropriations and Ways and Means committees. In the last regime for example (the Democratic majority from 84th–103rd Congresses), the majority committee proportion on the Appropriations committee mirrors their majority House proportion nearly perfectly, increasing when the majority House proportion increases, and more important for refuting DGG's theory, decreasing when the majority House proportion decreases. More explicitly, for the entire time period studied, the majority party experiences intra-regime committee-proportion losses (contrary to DGG's

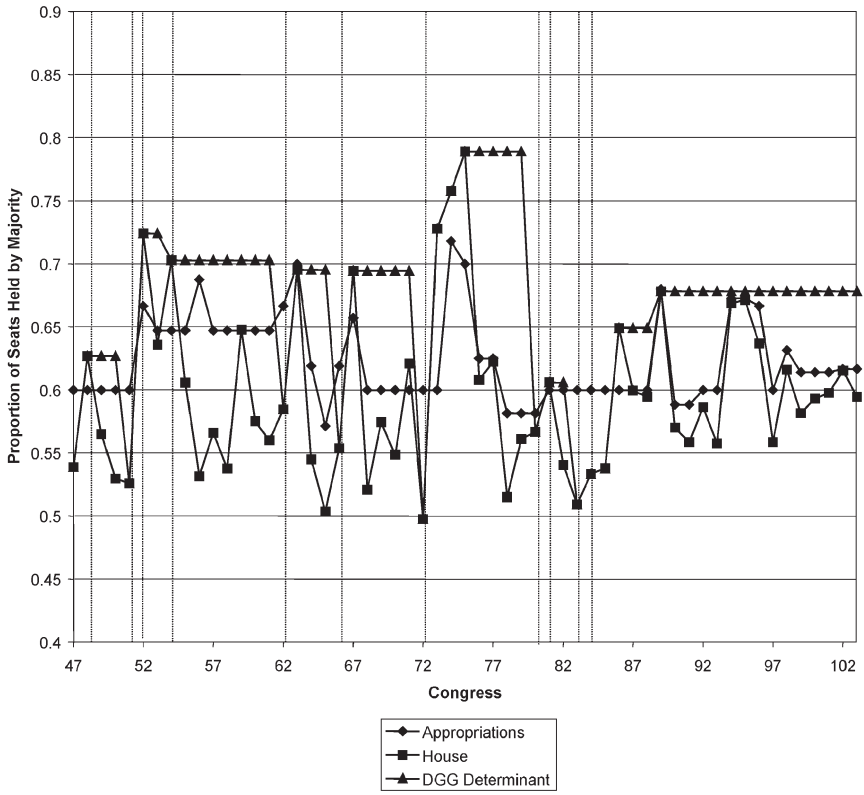


**Figure 3.** Majority Appropriations Committee and House Proportions (47th–103rd Congresses)

prediction) 40.3 percent, 7.0 percent, and 50.8 percent of the time for Appropriations, Rules, and Ways and Means, respectively. For all committees, these figures are statistically significant by conventional standards.[9]

While the most obvious prediction of DGG's model is not supported, it is still worth exploring the prediction of their model pertaining to changes in the state variable and increases in the majority committee proportion. To assess the veracity of this prediction, it is worthwhile to first consider whether the state variable (as it has been measured, with majority House proportion) follows a random walk process. Considering the large shifts in the majority House proportion in Figures 2–4, the obvious answer to this question would be 'no' – the majority House proportion sometimes moves in small

9. $p < .10$ for Rules, $p < .01$ for both Appropriations and Ways and Means (two-tailed test).

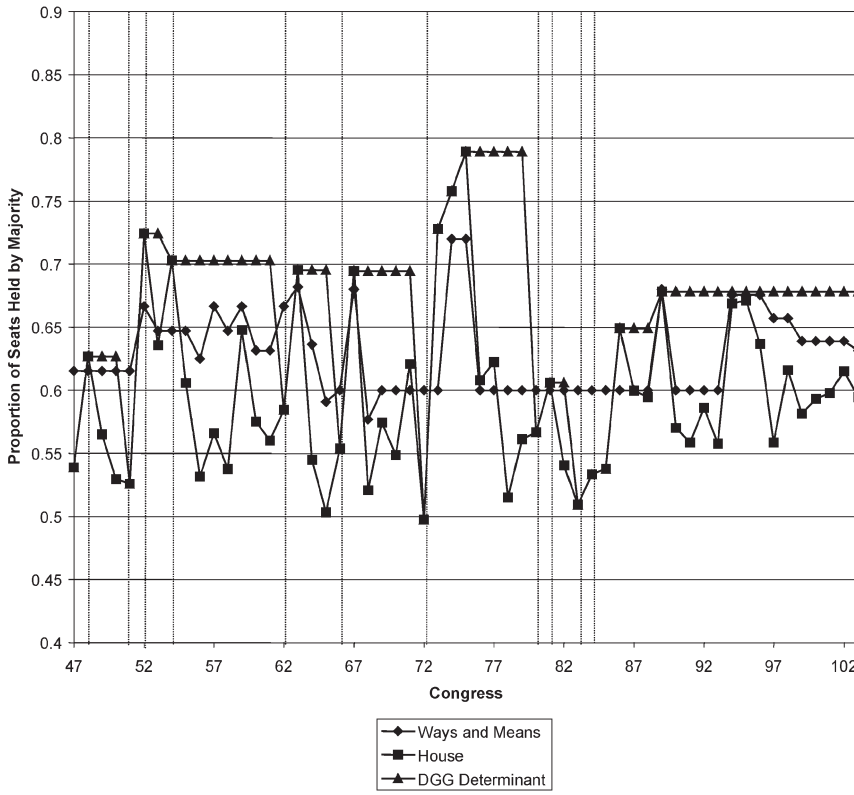


**Figure 4.** Majority Ways and Means Committee and House Proportions (47th–103rd Congresses)

steps, and comparatively large steps between Congresses, contrary to what we'd expect if it followed a random walk process. To assess whether the majority House proportion is a reasonable approximation of a state variable that follows a random walk process, however, it is sufficient to identify whether the value of majority House proportion helps predict whether the majority party will maintain its majority status in the next Congress.[10] Bluntly put, if a majority party holds a large proportion of the seats in

10. To the extent that this is not the case, then it would mean that all majority house proportions correspond to a single state in DGGs theory, and hence, DGG's result would be identical to Alesina's model of political compromise and policy convergence (1988). Accordingly, an appropriate test of DGG would be to identify whether majority committee proportion is constant within majority party regimes, which as demonstrated in Tables 1–3, is obviously not the case. The author thanks a referee for this insightful point.

$\text{Congress}_t$, is it more likely to be the majority party in $\text{Congress}_{t+1}$? A simple probit model that regresses a dummy variable coded one if a new majority was established in $\text{Congress}_t$ onto the majority House proportion in $\text{Congress}_{t-1}$ reveals that this is, in fact, the case. The coefficient on majority House proportion in $\text{Congress}_{t-1}$ is $(-10.56)$, indicating that the larger the majority party's seat share was in the previous Congress, the more likely it is to maintain majority status in the current Congress.[11]

Having established that majority House proportion is a reasonable approximation of the state variable as articulated by DGG, regression analysis is conducted on the following equation for each committee:[12]

$$\textit{Majority Committee Proportion in Congress}_t = \alpha + \beta_1 \times \textit{DGG Determinant in Congress}_t + \beta_2 \times \textit{Majority House Proportion in Congress}_t + \varepsilon_t$$

If DGG's theory is accurate, then we expect the following hypotheses to be true:

$$H1\text{: } \beta_1 > 0.$$

As the majority House proportion increases above the maximum level the majority party has experienced during its current stint in the majority up to, and including, $\text{Congress}_t$, the majority committee proportion on the Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means committees should increase.

$$H2\text{: } \beta_2 = 0$$

Any changes in the majority House proportion should have no effect on the majority committee proportion when controlling for whether these changes are increases above the intra-regime majority House proportion maximum up to, and including, $\text{Congress}_t$.

11. The $t$-statistic on majority house proportion in $\text{Congress}_{t-1}$ is 2.31. Substantively, the findings imply that for every one percentage point increase in majority house proportion in $\text{Congress}_{t-1}$ above its mean value, the probability of a new majority party being established in $\text{Congress}_t$ decreases by 2.45 percent.

12. Concerns might be raised with employing a linear specification to analyze a dependent variable (a proportion) that is constrained to the interval [0, 1]. From an econometric standpoint, such analysis is not entirely appropriate, as it violates one of the fundamental assumptions of classical linear regression, and in perverse instances might actually yield coefficient estimates that generate predicted values outside of the interval [0, 1]. To ensure that this specification was not obviously biasing the qualitative results discussed below, alternate specifications were analyzed where both the dependent and independent variables were log-transformed. The results from these analyses are substantively identical to those reported here for the more simple, linear specification. Furthermore, if one generates predicted values for the dependent variables based on the coefficients in Tables 1–3, where the independent variables are evaluated at their extreme values, one sees that all predicted values lie within the interval [0, 1].

**Table 1.** Determinants of Majority Party Representation on House Rules Committee*

| Variable | (1) | (2) |
|---|---|---|
| DGG Determinant | −0.093 | |
| | (2.63) | |
| Majority House proportion | 0.096 | 0.055 |
| | (3.09) | (1.94) |
| Constant | 0.656 | 0.620 |
| | (23.15) | (25.24) |
| Rho | 0.903 | 0.891 |
| *N* | 57 | 57 |
| Adjusted-$R^2$ | 0.730 | 0.715 |

*Prais–Winsten AR(1) regression coefficients with *t*-statistics in parentheses

An alternative hypothesis, consistent with conventional wisdom on committee assignment politics, is that the majority committee proportion should be responsive to the majority House proportion, regardless of how large the majority House proportion is in comparison to other Congresses (intra- or inter-regime): $H3$: $\beta_2 > 0$. Tests indicate that all three majority committee proportions follow an autoregressive process, and the estimates for the Ways and Means committee suffer from heteroskedasticity.[13] To address these data problems, the above models were analyzed via Prais–Winsten AR(1) regression, with the models for Ways and Means being estimated with Huber–White (robust) standard errors. Tables 1–3 present the results for each committee individually.[14]

In each table, Equation (1) estimates the above models controlling for the DGG Determinant and majority House proportion, while Equation (2) simply regresses majority committee proportion onto majority House proportion. In each table, several points stand out. First, for Appropriations,

13. The Durbin–Watson statistics were 0.258, 1.317, and 1.415 for Rules, Appropriations and Ways and Means, respectively. Conducting a Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity yielded $\chi^2$-statistics of 0.85, 0.91, and 5.63 for Rules, Appropriations and Ways and Means, respectively.

14. Potential concerns about multicollinearity following from the correlation between DGG and $H_t$ (.46) do not appear to prove substantively troublesome. As noted in Tables 1–3, when excluding DGG, the coefficients and significance levels of $\beta_2$ remain substantively identical to when DGG is included. Furthermore, in separate analyses, the models were estimated controlling for DGG, while excluding $H_t$. The results for Rules are substantively identical to those

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**Table 2.** Determinants of Majority Party Representation on House Appropriations Committee*

| Variable | (1) | (2) |
|---|---|---|
| DGG Determinant | −0.054 | |
| | (.091) | |
| Majority House proportion | 0.315 | 0.295 |
| | (5.58) | (5.94) |
| Constant | 0.471 | 0.447 |
| | (12.38) | (14.87) |
| Rho | 0.438 | 0.393 |
| *N* | 57 | 57 |
| Adjusted-$R^2$ | 0.619 | 0.597 |

* Prais–Winsten AR(1) regression coefficients with and *t*-statistics in parentheses

Rules, and Ways and Means, one can successfully reject the null hypothesis that $\beta_2 = 0$ by all conventional measures of statistical significance (*t*-statistics are in parentheses). For all three committees, the coefficient on majority House proportion is positive and statistically significant. Even on the power committees, then, majority party representation in $\text{Congress}_t$ is highly responsive to the size of the majority party in that Congress. Proving more troublesome for DGG's theory is the fact that across all three models, the prediction that $\beta_1 > 0$ is not supported.[15] For two of the three models (Appropriations and Ways and Means), $\beta_1$ is statistically indistinguishable from zero; and for Rules, it appears that the DGG determinant is

reported in the paper, and while the results for Ways and Means and Appropriations demonstrated that $\beta_1$ is positive and statistically significant, there is reason to suspect that this result follows from omitted variable bias, as these models yielded much lower $R^2$ estimates than those reported in Tables 2 and 3 (.37 and .36 for Appropriations and Ways and Means, respectively). Furthermore, the robustness of the findings pertaining to $\beta_2$ across models in Tables 1–3 offers additional support for this conclusion.

15. The regression specification above implicitly imposes symmetry across parties, as is consistent with DGGs theory. In other words, it does not allow for the possibility that the mapping between the independent variables and majority committee proportion is different for Republicans and Democrats. Nevertheless, further analysis was conducted, focusing on each party separately. Results from this further analysis generally comport with the conclusions found in analyzing the broader sample. In only one specification is the DGG determinant the hypothesized sign and statistically significant (majority Republican Party representation on the Appropriations committee). Due to the small sample size associated with Republican Party majority Congresses however (18 observations), it would be hasty to conclude that this is a generally robust finding.

**Table 3.** Determinants of Majority Party Representation on House Ways and Means Committee*

| Variable | (1) | (2) |
|---|---|---|
| DGG Determinant | −0.062 | |
| | (1.17) | |
| Majority House proportion | 0.345 | 0.319 |
| | (4.77) | (4.46) |
| Constant | 0.465 | 0.438 |
| | (10.00) | (10.80) |
| Rho | 0.406 | 0.356 |
| *N* | 57 | 57 |
| $R^2$ | 0.666 | 0.633 |

* Prais–Winsten AR(1) regression coefficients with robust standard errors and *t*-statistics in parentheses

significantly negatively related to majority party representation on that committee. Once one controls for majority House proportion in $\text{Congress}_t$, higher intra-regime peaks in the majority's House proportion actually decrease majority party representation on the Rules committee.

In light of the inconclusive findings pertaining to the DGG Determinant, it seems that the more appropriate model for analyzing majority party committee proportions is Equation (2) in Tables 1–3. The results of these regressions indicate that while majority House proportion has a significantly positive effect on majority committee proportion, it is less so for Rules (both statistically and substantively).[16] Only a monstrous change in the partisan composition of the House could move the House Rules committee significantly from a situation in which the majority party held 62 percent of the Rules committee seats. In contrast, Appropriations and Ways and Means committee ratios are much more responsive to changes in the composition in the House. Partisan parity in the House, for instance, will lead to the majority party holding approximately 59 percent of seats on both the Appropriations and Ways and Means committees. For every 5 percent increase in the size of the majority party, an additional 1.5 percent of seats on these committees will go to majority party members. (And, in contrast to DGG, decreases in the size of the majority will also lead to significant decreases in its representation on these committees.)

16. The results for Rules are likely a statistical artifact following from the small size and relatively stable party ratio on the committee across the period studied (in contrast to Appropriations and Ways and Means).

Besides contradicting DGG's theory, these findings prove relevant for Aldrich and Rohde's theory of Conditional Party Government. As noted by Aldrich and Rohde in their discussion of committee ratio politics (2000: 43), 'Majority leaders should be more likely to create bonus seats [on Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means] when the context puts the party program in the most jeopardy, such as when the partisan division of the chamber is relatively close.' Consistent with this statement then, we would expect to see the coefficient on *majority House ratio* being less than one, indicating that majority party over-representation on these prestige committees decreases with the size of the majority party. This is obviously the case, as majority party leaders appear to negotiate greater levels of over-representation the smaller their majority is in a given Congress.[17]

## IV. Conclusion

The role of the minority party in American politics and legislative organization is both understudied and poorly understood. Dixit, Grossman and Gul have taken an important step in trying to address the roles of both parties in legislative politics by developing a parsimonious and analytically rigorous model of political compromise that actually attributes a valuable (and non-trivial) role to minority parties. These positives aside, however, their model has not withstood the scrutiny of empirical testing particularly well.

Dixit, Grossman and Gul are correct in arguing that in equilibrium, the majority party does not grab the entire pie of committee assignments for itself, but rather allocates a portion of the pie to the minority. Given that party leaders interact with each other in repeated settings and they operate in an environment in which their bargaining positions are profoundly tied to their electoral fortunes, Dixit, Grossman and Gul's model offers much in trying to capture the real-world dynamic that exists between the parties. In many ways, their model is an excellent complement to Weingast's (1979) seminal study of distributive politics, in which he hypothesizes (p. 254) that repeated interactions between legislators facilitate universalism (or, alternatively, prevent exclusionary policies from being adopted by a legislature). Furthermore, by implicitly incorporating electoral uncertainty into party bargaining, DGG have formalized a characteristic present in less

17. This reinforces the results that Aldrich and Rohde report on the negative relationship between majority party size and the number of majority 'bonus seats' on Rules, Ways and Means and Appropriations for the 103–105th Congresses. 'Bonus seats' are defined by Aldrich and Rohde as the number of seats on a committee beyond number expected if the House and Committee were to have equal partisan proportions.

formal theories of minority–majority party interactions, such as Binder's (1996) discussion of the creation or suppression of minority procedural rights, and Krehbiel and Wiseman's (forthcoming) concept of 'legislative bipartisanship'.

Inconsistent with their model, however, data analysis reveals that House committee assignments are responsive to the proportion of House seats the majority party currently holds, regardless of whether it is a high-water mark for the party currently in power up until that point in time. Hence, their theory fails to fully explain the mechanism by which division of the (figurative) pie occurs; and we are still presented with a complicated problem with no obvious answer in sight. While it may be straightforward to devise a model that explains why cooperation ensues between parties across elections, we do not understand the precise mechanism that governs the division of the figurative pie. Given that Dixit, Grossman and Gul fully characterize the efficient division of goods between parties, one wonders what is occurring (in reality) to prevent efficient divisions from being realized? Why do parties pervasively adopt a proportional representation rule in committee assignments, rather than a 'ratcheting' division that would be consistent with DGG? More broadly speaking, in the context of the US Congress, we are in need of a theory that answers the following:

(a) Why does the minority party receive any benefits?
(b) What causes the share of the minority benefits/committee seats to vary over time?
(c) And (accepting the findings of this study as stylized fact) why does the minority party's allocation of committee seats (and presumably other benefits) appear to be highly responsive to the proportion of seats held by the majority party in the House?

Uncovering the answer to these questions will shed light on the inner workings of legislative politics in the United States, and will have implications for theories of legislative organization, as well as for theories of electoral processes and lawmaking. Further theoretical work will hopefully be informed by the empirical findings presented here and will be successful at answering these questions.

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