



The Politics of Speaker Cannon's Committee Assignments

Eric D. Lawrence; Forrest Maltzman; Paul J. Wahlbeck

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Jul., 2001), 551-562.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0092-5853%28200107%2945%3A3%3C551%3ATPOSCC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-G>

American Journal of Political Science is currently published by Midwest Political Science Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/mpsa.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Politics of Speaker Cannon's Committee Assignments

Eric D. Lawrence George Washington University
Forrest Maltzman George Washington University
Paul J. Wahlbeck George Washington University

We explore Speaker Joseph G. Cannon's exercise of his committee assignment power, using recently discovered notebooks maintained by Speaker Cannon that detail members' committee requests and the lobbying that accompanied these requests. We show that Cannon's assignment power was predictably constrained in many ways in both the 58th and 61st Congresses, yet he took advantage of his powers to further both his party's and his own policy and political interests. Cannon was a strategic leader whose assignment criteria evolved along with his own personal political fortunes. Furthermore, we demonstrate that lobbying on behalf of a member's committee assignment request influences the Speaker's decision-making process.

Perhaps the most fabled example of the Speaker's use of institutional power is Speaker Joseph Cannon's appointment of committees in the early twentieth century (Jones 1968). Conventional wisdom holds that Cannon used his unilateral control over assignments to further a variety of political goals, including securing Cannon's own position as House leader. Although Cannon's critics insisted that Cannon manipulated committee assignments for his own purposes (Norris 1946), scholarly views of his assignments offer a much more complicated portrait (Chiu 1928; Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist 1969; Shepsle 1978; and Krehbiel and Wiseman forthcoming).

We use newly discovered archival evidence—personal notebooks maintained by Cannon's staff for the Speaker's use—to enrich our understanding of the assignment process during an earlier set of legislative institutions. We build upon previous portraits of Cannon's assignment practices in two important respects. First, we demonstrate that Cannon was a strategic leader who systematically employed different assignment criteria at different stages of his speakership. Whereas during his first term in office (the 58th Congress, 1903–1905) Cannon used his powers to promote party loyalty, at the start of the 61st Congress (1909–1911), Cannon used his power to punish members whom he viewed as personally disloyal. Second, we suggest that assignment decisions are shaped by auxiliary actors inside and outside the House chamber.

Eric D. Lawrence is Visiting Instructor in Political Science, George Washington University, 2201 G Street, N.W. Suite 524, Washington D.C. 20052 (edl@gwu.edu). Forrest Maltzman is Associate Professor of Political Science, George Washington University, 2201 G Street, N.W. Suite 524, Washington D.C. 20052 (Forrest@gwu.edu). Paul J. Wahlbeck is Associate Professor of Political Science, George Washington University, 2201 G Street, N.W. Suite 524, Washington D.C. 20052 (Wahlbeck@gwu.edu).

The authors gratefully acknowledge the research assistance provided by Michael Baratz and the financial assistance of the Caterpillar Foundation, the Dirksen Congressional Center, George Washington University's University Facilitating Fund, and the University of California, Riverside Academic Senate research grant. The authors also acknowledge the assistance provided by Sarah Binder, Ken Kato, Lee Sigelman, Elizabeth Rybicki, Charles Stewart, and Ray Strong, as well as the comments of Shaun Bowler, Keith Krehbiel, Timothy Nokken, Nelson Polsby, Eric Schickler, and Steve Smith.

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 45, No. 3, July 2001, Pp. 551–562

©2001 by the Midwest Political Science Association

Committee Assignments by Unitary Actors

Given the centrality of committee positions to members' legislative careers, we might expect that concentrating committee assignment powers in a unitary actor would intensify the efforts of members to secure favorable treatment. In this section, we develop a model of the committee assignment process by a unitary actor, assessing pressures inside and outside the institution that likely constrain the choices of the speaker in making assignments.

The Role of Auxiliary Actors

If committees are important in the formulation of policy outcomes and competition for assignments is keen, we would expect auxiliary actors such as other members of Congress, interest groups, or interested citizens to try to influence assignments. Just as lobbying occurs in the formation of policy coalitions, so should lobbying emerge over the assignment of legislators to committees. The support of a requestor's colleagues or supporters outside the institution signals important political information. First, it indicates to the assignor whether a member has the capacity to assemble a legislative coalition. Second, it communicates the salience of the request to the legislator. The greater the effort a member makes to assemble support for his or her assignment request, the more highly the legislator likely values that particular assignment.

Nevertheless, "little is systematically known about actors in the assignment process other than position-seeking legislators themselves and those who make committee appointments..." (Eulau 1985, 224). According to Eulau, the failure of political scientists to fully account for the role of external actors in the assignment process stems from the lack of evidence (1985, 225). Nevertheless, Eulau is quick to point out that "the absence of 'evidence' still leaves open the question of whether there exists material that has not been mined" (225).

Although there has been relatively little attention paid to the role of auxiliary actors and no systematic study of their influence, anecdotal evidence from the post-war period suggests that auxiliary actors who are part of the House are likely to wield influence (Masters 1961; Clapp 1964; Shepsle 1978). The evidence regarding auxiliary actors outside the House is ambiguous. While Shepsle believes that actors outside the House "play a relatively minor role in that [assignment] process..." (1978, 162), Masters insists that "the influence of such groups is thought to be important, but little evidence is available on its nature and extent" (1961, 355).

With respect to the Cannon era, Cannon's records suggest that actors other than position-seeking legislators

sought to influence his final decisions. Throughout Cannon's personal notebooks on committee assignments are notations about groups and individuals that had spoken or written to Cannon and his staff about particular members. While some of the groups and individuals were members of Congress (usually state delegations), others were not. Because of the importance of the signals sent by lobbying both internally and by outside groups, we expect members of Congress will be more likely to get a desired slot if either a member of the House or an individual or group outside of the House encourages Cannon to make a sought after committee assignment.

Partisan Considerations

Like all speakers, Cannon also had partisan and policy goals. As a rational actor, we would expect him to take these goals into consideration when reviewing members' committee requests. First, party leaders are concerned about their party's electoral needs (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Bawn 1998; Sinclair 1995). As a result, it has long been maintained that desirable committee assignments are disproportionately given to members who represent "marginal" districts (Masters 1961; Clapp 1964; but see Bullock 1972, 1973; Shepsle 1978, 208; Smith and Ray 1983).

Of course, party leaders cannot assume that members will be blindly loyal to party goals. For this reason, loyalty is likely to influence the allocation of party favors. In particular, we expect Cannon to disproportionately grant favorable assignments to supporters of the Republican agenda. Cannon suggested as much when he justified his decision to demote insurgent committee chairs during the 61st Congress (*Congressional Record*, 61st Congress, 2nd session, p. 3321).

Personal Political Goals

We might also expect a speaker with unilateral control over assignments to use the assignment process to further his own personal goals. One of the goals of party leaders is to maintain their own position as leader (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Bawn 1998). As a result, we might expect Cannon to reward his allies with desired assignments (Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist 1969, 794; Follett [1896] 1974).

Institutional Constraints

A desire to conform to informal rules or norms of the House may have limited Cannon's assignment options and thus need to be incorporated into a model of assign-

ments to avoid underspecification. The first is the committee seniority norm: members who serve on a committee have the right to retain their seat when reelected (Goodwin 1959, 413). Chamber seniority influences assignments in two ways. First, some have argued that those members who have served the longest are granted desired committee transfers before their more junior colleagues (Goodwin 1959; Bullock 1973). Second, others have argued that members who are just beginning their congressional careers are likely to be discriminated against when they are competing for an assignment against a more senior colleague who seeks to transfer (Bullock 1970). Cannon's desire or need to ensure geographic diversity may have also constrained the choices he made (Chiu 1928; Goodwin 1959; Masters 1961). In particular, we expect that the likelihood Cannon will support a committee assignment request is inversely related to the number of members from the same state requesting the desired committee.

In addition to the constraint imposed by committee seniority, chamber seniority, and geographic diversity norms, Cannon may very well have considered members' experience or background when making appointments. Several scholars have suggested that the committee system exists because of the House's need for the level of expertise that can best be provided by the division of labor (Cooper 1970; Krehbiel 1991). Members who have previous expertise in a particular policy area are able to provide the chamber with better information and at a lower cost than those who are unfamiliar with the policy questions that fall under a particular committee's jurisdiction. As a result, Cannon will be more likely to grant committee requests that are from members who have "experience" in a related area.

Data and Methods

To determine whether Cannon's assignments were designed to satisfy competing demands, we need data not simply on members' committee portfolios, but also on their committee requests. Previous analyses of the Cannon era have been indeterminate. In a few spectacular cases, Cannon is said to have used his control over committee assignments to seek retribution on his enemies (Jones 1968). In contrast, Chiu argues that Cannon abided by the seniority principle (1928, 23). Although Chiu indicates how regularly Cannon violated seniority (1928, 71), he could not systematically study Cannon's assignments because he did not have information on assignment requests. Chiu himself noted the limitations of his

research. When explaining that some of Cannon's assignments violated the seniority principle, Chiu notes that "not all were arbitrarily made by the Speaker; some were made at the request of the members themselves" (71).¹

The critical problem in evaluating these competing views of Cannon's assignment practices is that we have lacked data on the internal politics of the committee assignment process that might condition our assessment of Cannon's "arbitrary" power. Here we use Cannon's committee assignment notebooks discovered in a chest of newly discovered Cannon papers.² The notebooks include members' requested committees in what appears to be a ranked preference order, as well as notes and other entries (such as electoral results) that Cannon's staff likely believed were important to Cannon's assignment decisions.

For example, George Norris's (R-NE) page from the 58th assignment book notes that Norris was a new member who sought a seat on the Public Buildings and Grounds Committee. Under the section of the form labeled "Record, Remarks, Endorsements, Etc." it states:

Commended by ex. Senator Manderson generally. Norris says Nebraska should be represented on Public Buildings & Grounds as Mercer is out; his district is close—his majority only 181. Wants a bldg. at Grand Island for strengthening purposes, etc.; it would ensure Republican vote from that District. . . .

These data, in short, provide the critical missing evidence necessary to model speaker assignment decisions: not only what assignments were doled out, but also what assignments were sought and lobbied for by legislators and their supporters.

Getting an Assignment in the 58th Congress

Not including Cannon, two hundred and six Republicans served at the start of the 58th Congress. Although the assignment notebook has a page for every member, detailed

¹Stewart (1992, 840) warns about treating transfers as "revealed preferences" prior to 1911.

²When the Republicans took control of the House in 1994, some of the attic space in the Cannon office building was converted into office space. While cleaning out a storage cage for the Appropriations committee, congressional staffers came across a wooden chest that had been prepared to ship Cannon's papers home. The records are now available through the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives.

notes and committee assignment requests only exist for 156 Republican members. For the remaining fifty Republicans, the only thing contained in the notebook is background information that was easily compiled by his staff (first congress served, election results, committees served on during the 57th Congress). These fifty members were disproportionately senior and were likely to have sought reappointment to the committee upon which they served during the 57th Congress.³

To test our expectations, we examine whether each Republican assignment request was granted.⁴ Thus, we have one observation for each request. Among the 156 members for whom requests were noted, there are a total of 474 specific committee assignment requests.

Our first hypothesis suggests that Cannon will be more likely to grant the requests of members with the strongest electoral claims. To test this hypothesis, we use two measures. First, we look at the percentage of the vote each Republican received. These data are derived from the electoral outcomes included in Cannon's notebook. We expect members who had a narrow electoral victory to disproportionately receive desired assignments. Of course, this measure has the drawback that not every committee requested has constituency benefits (Fenno 1973; Deering and Smith 1997). Thus, as a second measure we code whether a member, a colleague, or someone outside the House informed Cannon that a particular committee assignment would be appropriate because of its relation to a member's district (electoral benefit). For example, Norris's 58th Congress assignment request led us to code Public Buildings and Grounds as having an electoral benefit for him.

To test the hypothesis that Cannon favored members who were most likely to support the Republican party's agenda, we use Poole and Rosenthal's (1997) D-NOMINATE score for each member of the 58th Congress. Since the Republican median score is higher than the Democratic median score, members with higher scores are more likely to be loyal on Republican policy votes. To determine whether Cannon disproportionately favored members who supported Cannon as leader, we use both the letters contained in Cannon's personal papers and comments included in his assignment notebook to identify members who were Cannon supporters. In the 58th Congress assignment book, we found a handful of letters written prior to the start of the 58th Congress. In October 1902,

Cannon sent many Republicans elected to the 58th Congress a letter asking for their support in his bid to replace Speaker Henderson (R-IA). In response, several members wrote Cannon a personal note stating that they would support his bid to be speaker. There are also letters from members who were helping Cannon campaign for the speakership. The letters frequently provide additional information about which members were supporting Cannon. In addition to these individual letters, Cannon's files contain a copy of a letter he sent to every Republican member of the West Virginia delegation on November 16, 1902. In this letter he asks the delegation to endorse his candidacy for speaker and explains that he has already secured the support of the Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Wyoming delegations (Letter from Joseph Cannon to Members of the West Virginia delegation). Cannon had good reason to believe that the representatives from these states were early backers of his candidacy. We create a dummy variable to denote the seventy-two members who, because of either personal correspondence or because they were from a state where the delegation endorsed Cannon early, Cannon would have considered a supporter (personal backer).

To test our internal and external actor hypotheses, we code the information in Cannon's notebook that indicated whether someone within the institution endorsed a member for a particular assignment. If either another member of the House or a state delegation endorsed a member, we code that committee assignment request as having an internal endorsement. Of the 206 Republicans contained in Cannon's notebook, 49.0 percent had a note that implied an internal endorsement. Likewise, we went through Cannon's notes to identify those members who had the support of individuals or groups outside the House (external endorsement).⁵

We also examine the extent to which Cannon was constrained by the norms of the House. Thus, we include in our model a measure for each member's chamber seniority as well as a measure of their chamber seniority squared to account for the nonlinearity in the relationship between seniority and request success created by the apprenticeship effects. To test the geographic diversity hypothesis, we create a variable that is a count of the number of members from a given state that request a given committee (state competition).

To ascertain whether Cannon was more likely to assign those who were experts in a particular policy area to

³In the appendix (which can be found at ajps.org), we estimate a selection model to demonstrate that our results do not demonstrate selection bias.

⁴To determine committee assignments, we rely upon Canon, Nelson, and Stewart (1998).

⁵The same proportion of the members, 49.0 percent, had external endorsements and roughly two-thirds of the members had both types of endorsements.

a relevant committee, we relied upon the comments that were provided by the members and those who endorsed their requests. If it was noted in the assignment book that someone claimed that the member had relevant experience for a desired committee slot, we coded the request as coming from a specialist. For example, we coded Representative Milton Daniels' (R-CA) request to be appointed to the Banking and Currency Committee as coming from a specialist since it was noted in the assignment book that he "has been a banker many years."

Finally, we also include three control variables. One variable denotes the number of assignments each member requested (number of requests). Our rationale for including this is that the odds someone will receive a particular assignment depend in large part upon the number of assignments sought (Rohde and Shepsle 1973; Smith and Ray 1983). Since the probability that a member receives a particular assignment depends upon the extent to which demand outstrips supply (Shepsle 1978), we calculate the number of total requests for a committee. Finally, we also control for whether the request was for a "key" or "exclusive" committee (key request). According to Chiu (1928, 69), during this period there was a norm that members would not serve on more than one of ten key committees. We expect key requests to be granted less frequently, even after accounting for the greater competition for the slots on the committees.

Results

Of the 474 specific committee assignment requests that were made during the 58th Congress, 38.6 percent were granted. Although 38.6 percent of all requests were granted, our exploration of this data demonstrated that one class of requests is disproportionately granted. In the first row of Table 1, we break down the 474 specific committee requests that were made during the 58th Congress by whether or not the member served on a requested committee during the previous Congress. As the table makes clear, requests to be reassigned to a committee were granted almost 89.15 percent of the time.⁶ In contrast, new assignment requests were granted 19.7 percent of the time. Because of the prominent role played by the committee seniority norm, almost every study of committee assignments during the era after the revolt against Cannon (e.g., Shepsle 1978) treat reassignment and transfer/freshman requests separately. Since Cannon

generally respected committee seniority, we follow the post-war convention and limit the subsequent analysis to the 345 requests that were made by either freshman who had no assignments or senior members who sought to transfer.

The remaining rows in column 1, Table 1 show the relationship between our noncontrol independent variables and the likelihood a request was granted in the 58th Congress. As expected, Republicans who secured either internal or external endorsements, claimed that an assignment would aid their reelection (electoral benefit), were more conservative (party loyalty), supported Cannon's candidacy for Speaker (personal backer), had fewer competitors from within their state delegation seeking the same assignment (state competition), and were noted in the assignment book as having some expertise (specialist) were more likely to receive a sought after assignment.

If one takes seriously Follett's ([1896] 1974, 222–223) argument that the Speaker at the start of the twentieth century had to balance competing demands when making assignments, a multivariate model is necessary. To determine whether the differences in Table 1, column 3 hold up when subjected to multivariate controls, we model in column 1 of Table 2 whether each of the 345 Republican requests was granted.⁷

Table 2 makes clear that Cannon's partisan goals also entered into the assignment process. The significance of the party loyalty score suggests that members seeking a committee transfer and freshman members without any committee seniority were more likely to be granted committee requests if they supported the Republican agenda. Our finding that Cannon consistently favored more extreme Republicans in the 58th Congress contradicts the conclusion that Krehbiel and Wiseman (forthcoming) reached from their analysis of portfolios in the 61st Congress.

In cases where members sought a new assignment, internal endorsements ($p < .05$, one tailed) and external endorsements ($p < .01$, one tailed) are statistically significant. Cannon's consideration of endorsements in his decision calculus may reflect the fact that members' ability to gain endorsements was also indicative of a member's ability to build coalitions, both inside and outside of Congress. Although Cannon may have used the assignment process to help his party during the 58th Congress, the multivariate model demonstrates that Cannon did not manipulate the assignment process to further his own personal goals. The variable tapping whether a

⁶It appears unlikely that the fourteen nonreassignments were done in spite of objections from the member who asked to be reassigned. Indeed, none of the fourteen requests involved a committee that Krehbiel and Wiseman (forthcoming) portrayed as being one of the ten most desirable committees.

⁷We use probit to estimate the likelihood that a request will be granted, with robust standard errors clustered for each member.

TABLE 1 Bivariate Relationships Between Independent and Dependent Variables

<i>Dichotomous Variable</i>	58th Congress: % of Time Request Granted			61st Congress: % of Time Request Granted		
	<i>I</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Diff.</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Diff.</i>
Prior Service on Committee [1, 0]	89.15	19.71	69.44	100.00	24.43	75.57
Internal Endorsement [1, 0]	25.32	18.05	7.27	38.10	22.58	15.52
External Endorsement [1, 0]	25.00	16.74	8.26	35.29	21.83	13.46
Electoral Benefit [1, 0]	22.22	19.33	2.89	20.00	24.70	-4.70
Personal backer [1, 0]	22.32	18.45	3.87	—	—	—
Specialist [1, 0]	41.67	18.92	22.75	33.33	24.12	9.21
<i>Continuous Variable</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>Diff.</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>Diff.</i>
Vote Percent ^a [Small v. large margin]	19.80	25.64	-5.84	31.82	22.73	9.09
Party Loyalty ^b [Most loyal v. least loyal]	22.12	17.24	4.88	18.18	21.43	-3.25
Procedural defector ^c [High v. Never]	—	—	—	14.29	25.32	-11.03
Policy Defector ^d [Yes v. No]	—	—	—	12.50	25.62	-13.12
Chamber Seniority ^e [1st term v. > 2nd term]	22.93	24.62	-1.69	27.47	19.67	7.80
State Competition ^f [1 request v. > 2 requests]	24.55	11.54	13.01	26.36	24.24	2.12

Note: The cells contain the percentage of the time a request was granted conditioned upon the values of the independent variables.

- Small margin (I) is defined as being in the quartile with narrowest electoral margins; large margin (II) is defined as being in the quartile with the largest margins.
- Most loyal members (I) are in the quartile voting most often with the party; least loyal members (II) are in the quartile voting least often with the party.
- Members with high levels of procedural defection (I) vote against Cannon on the rules multiple times; some members never defect (II) on the rules.
- Policy defectors vote against Cannon on the Payne-Aldrich tariff. (I) denotes defection; (II) denotes no defection.
- First term members (I) are compared here to more senior members (II), members in their third or higher term.
- Members with little in-state competition (I) are compared to members with high levels of in-state competition (II).

member is a personal backer of Cannon is statistically insignificant. Rather than enhancing the careers of his personal loyalists, Cannon used the assignments to benefit the caucus.

Our analysis of the 58th congressional assignments can yield the following interpretation of the decision calculus that Cannon likely used in making committee assignments. First, if the committee requested is a committee that the member served on previously, return the member to that committee, making rare exceptions (row

1, Table 1). Second, if the committee requested is a new committee, make the assignments that will best serve the Republicans' policy goals (Table 2, 58th Congress). Although partisanship structured Cannon's decisions on new committee assignments, if one looks at assignments as a whole, Cannon largely "worked within the system," accepting the committee seniority norm and the need for geographic diversity. Cannon was a sophisticated political actor who allowed numerous factors to influence his assignment decisions.

TABLE 2 Likelihood that a Request was Granted, 58th and 61st Congresses
(probit estimates of Republican freshman/transfer requests only)

Independent Variable (expected sign)	58th Congress		61st Congress		
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Internal Endorsement (+)	0.273 (1.66)*	0.678 (1.98)*	0.439 (1.38)	0.514 (1.60)	0.698 (2.04)*
External Endorsement (+)	0.393 (2.49)**	0.433 (1.65)*	0.402 (1.63)	0.428 (1.65)*	0.429 (1.66)*
Vote Percent (-)	2.251 (4.09)	0.663 (0.68)	0.139 (0.14)	0.147 (0.16)	0.733 (0.75)
Electoral Benefit (+)	0.132 (0.69)	-0.309 (-0.72)	-0.212 (-0.50)	-0.284 (-0.67)	-0.294 (-0.69)
Party Loyalty (+)	0.853 (1.98)*	-0.269 (-0.35)	0.781 (1.32)		
Personal Backer (+)	0.134 (0.92)				
Procedural Defector (-)		-0.220 (-1.77)*			-0.248 (-3.07)**
Policy Defector (-)		-0.154 (-0.62)		-0.442 (-2.09)*	
Chamber Seniority (+)	-0.128 (-0.50)	-0.043 (-0.22)	-0.043 (-0.23)	-0.059 (-0.32)	-0.043 (-0.23)
Seniority Squared (-)	-0.008 (-0.19)	-0.012 (-0.51)	-0.011 (-0.50)	-0.010 (-0.46)	-0.012 (-0.50)
State Competition (-)	-0.120 (-1.74)*	-0.046 (-0.44)	-0.049 (-0.46)	-0.040 (-0.37)	-0.054 (-0.50)
Specialist (+)	0.360 (0.90)	-0.294 (-0.55)	-0.071 (-0.13)	-0.236 (-0.43)	-0.261 (-0.50)
Committee Competition (-)	-0.029 (-2.02)*	-0.007 (-0.60)	-0.008 (-0.62)	-0.005 (-0.38)	-0.008 (-0.66)
Number Of Requests (-)	-0.218 (-4.94)**	-0.084 (-1.45)	-0.080 (-1.39)	-0.087 (-1.54)	-0.084 (-1.50)
Key Request (-)	-0.018 (-0.09)	-0.202 (-0.63)	-0.163 (-0.51)	-0.257 (-0.80)	-0.175 (-0.55)
Constant	-1.020 (-1.80)*	-0.184 (-0.27)	-0.518 (-0.78)	-0.055 (-0.09)	-0.356 (-0.55)
Observations	345	176	176	176	176
log likelihood	-146.63	-89.42	-92.00	-90.58	-89.57

Notes: probit coefficients divided by robust standard errors in parentheses; variables described in text. Parameter estimates divided by robust standard errors in parentheses. One case (James Cassidy, R-OH) dropped from 61st due to missing data.

* denotes $p < .05$, one tailed; ** denotes $p < .01$, one tailed

Although our initial analysis was based upon the decisions Cannon made during the 58th Congress, there are reasons to suspect that his actions during this Congress were unrepresentative of his behavior at the end of his tenure. Indeed, Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist (1969), Jones (1968), Stewart (1992), and Brady and

Epstein (1997) all argue that it was during the second half of Cannon's tenure, especially the 61st Congress, that he began to violate seniority and thus earned the title "Czar Cannon." Indeed, while our analysis of the 58th Congress suggests that the discretion that Cannon had over assignments was used to help his party, the

successful and bipartisan revolt against Cannon at the end of his speakership suggests that by the 61st Congress many members did not view Cannon as a benevolent, avuncular leader.

Getting an Assignment in the 61st Congress

While the revolt is one indication that Cannon's relationship with the chamber differed in the 58th and 61st Congresses, there are contextual reasons for Cannon to alter his assignment criteria by the 61st Congress. Cannon's position within the House had changed dramatically since the 58th Congress. Whereas the Republican party was relatively unified during the 58th Congress, by the 61st Congress an articulate and significant "progressive" Republican faction had emerged.⁸ Second, Cannon's relationship with the President had changed between the 58th and 61st Congress. Whereas Cannon worked closely with President Roosevelt during Cannon's first three terms, Taft was elected President in 1908 and made his displeasure with Cannon publicly known on the campaign trail (Mowry 1962, 239–242). Finally, Cannon's relationship with the minority leader differed in the 58th and 61st Congress. During the 58th Congress, Cannon's friend, John Sharp Williams (D-MS), led the minority party. During the 61st Congress, Champ Clark (D-MO) was minority leader and significantly more partisan than Williams (Clark 1920).

Given these changes in the political context, the 61st Congress posed a more treacherous set of conditions for Cannon than the previous congresses. Previous research has established that Cannon punished many of the insurgent leaders by stripping them of their committee chairmanships (Jones 1968; Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist 1969), but did he likewise manipulate committee assignments more generally? Whether such manipulation occurred remains an empirical question that can now be answered systematically with the new evidence contained in the Cannon chest.⁹

To compare Cannon's behavior in the 58th and 61st congresses, we rely upon Cannon's assignment book for the 61st Congress. As independent variables, we again create vote percent, electoral benefit, party loyalty, internal endorsement, external endorsement, chamber senior-

ity, seniority squared, specialist, state competition, number of requests, committee competition, and key request measures. Because Cannon did not engage in a campaign to be speaker comparable to the campaign he engaged in between the 57th and 58th Congresses, his files are devoid of the sorts of letters necessary to create a personal backer measure comparable to that generated for the 58th Congress. Instead, we create a procedural defector scale based upon five votes that occurred on the opening day of the 61st session. Each of these five votes involved a challenge to Cannon's leadership and occurred prior to his committee assignment decisions.¹⁰ We know that Cannon kept track of these votes, because included in his papers are lists of defectors on each of these votes. The scale we created represents the number of times a member voted contradictory to Cannon's preferred position.

Beyond splitting over procedural matters, the Republican caucus was divided in large part over the tariff issue (Bolles 1951, 194; Baker 1973). While Cannon supported the tariff, progressive Republicans were largely opposed. Uncertainty over the Payne-Aldrich tariff led Cannon to call the 61st Congress into session in March of 1909, earlier than the typical December starting date. Cannon also delayed announcing committee assignments until after the tariff issue was resolved on April 9 as a way of keeping a majority together (Hasbrouck 1927, 36–37; Shepsle 1978, 21–22). Indeed, within Cannon's assignment book were two sheets labeled "Republicans voted against previous question on Rule for Tariff bill, April 5" and "Republicans who voted no on Rule, April 5, 1909 (Tariff)." The names on these sheets coincide with those members who voted against the Payne-Aldrich tariff rule (ICPSR votes #16, 17). To determine whether Cannon manipulated the assignment process to punish those who challenged him on the tariff, we created a policy defector scale. If a member supported Cannon on both votes, they were given a 0; if they supported him on one of the two votes, they were given a 1; and if they voted no on both tariff votes, they were coded 2.

Results

Among the 104 Republicans for whom requests are noted, there are a total of 221 specific committee assignment requests.¹¹ Eighty-eight requests (39.8 percent)

¹⁰The five votes were the speakership vote, the previous question on readopting the 60th rules, the vote on adopting the 60th rules for the 61st, the previous question on Clark's proposal to enlarge the Rules committee, and the Fitzgerald rules compromise providing for Calendar Wednesday.

¹¹The vast majority of the 115 Republicans who did not make requests during the 61st Congress were senior members who were

⁸Baker (1973) classified 19.6 percent of the Republicans in the 61st House as "insurgents."

⁹Cannon kept assignment notebooks for his first (58th) and last (61st) congresses only.

were granted. Of the 221 requests, forty-four are from members seeking to be reappointed to a committee they served on during the 60th Congress and 177 of these are from either one of the thirty-nine freshman Republicans elected to the 61st Congress or a senior member seeking to secure a new assignment. The right hand side of Table 1, row 1 shows that without exception, Cannon granted the forty-four reassignment requests. Once again, including these cases in our analysis is not appropriate. In the 61st Congress, Cannon continued to honor a member's request to be reappointed to a committee. Although historical accounts suggest that Cannon sought revenge by not reappointing Charles Lindbergh (R-MN) to Indian Affairs and George Norris (R-NE) to Public Buildings and Grounds, these decisions appear to be isolated.

In the right hand columns of Table 1, we show the relationship between our independent variables and the likelihood that a member received a desired assignment in the 61st Congress. These results suggest that Cannon's assignment calculus differed significantly in the 58th and the 61st Congresses. The differences between these congresses are apparent in the "difference" columns. In the 58th Congress, the electoral margin is inconsistent with our expectations. In the 61st Congress, this variable is consistent with our expectations in the bivariate table. Likewise, the electoral benefit and seniority variables were consistent with our expectations in the 58th Congress; in the 61st inconsistent. Perhaps the most important distinction between the 58th and 61st assignment patterns that is discernible from the bivariate table involves the party loyalty hypothesis. In the 58th Congress, one of our main substantive conclusions was that Cannon favored the more conservative members of his caucus when making assignments. In the 58th Congress, the Republicans whose NOMINATE scores placed them in the most conservative quartile received a desired assignment 4.88 percent more often than those in the most liberal quartile. In the 61st Congress, there is no indication that Cannon favored conservative Republicans. Instead of discriminating against those Republicans who were consistently most likely to vote with the Democrats, Cannon appears to discriminate against those who challenged his own grasp on power (procedural defector) and those Republicans who did not support his protectionist views on the tariff (policy defector).

reappointed to a committee on which they served during the 60th Congress. With one exception, the remaining senior members were either appointed to a committee chairmanship or to a prestige committee. George Norris appears to be the only returning member who did not make a request or receive an assignment that was comparable or better than the one they held during the 60th Congress.

Once again, we ask whether the observed bivariate patterns withstand multivariate controls. In Table 2, we model whether a member who requested a new assignment in the 61st Congress received the assignment. For the 61st Congress, we estimated four separate equations to allow for various combinations of the party and personal loyalty variables.¹² The parameter estimates confirm the conclusion we drew by comparing the 58th and 61st bivariate results: Cannon's decision-making criteria evolved across his tenure as Speaker.

In the 58th Congress, Cannon took into account the likelihood that a member would support the Republican agenda when making assignments for those who wanted a new committee assignment; in the 61st Congress, there is no evidence of this pattern. The party loyalty coefficient is statistically insignificant, even when included without the defector measures in Equation (2). Although Cannon may have claimed on the floor of the House that he was demoting committee chairs who "failed to enter and abide by a Republican caucus" (*Congressional Record*, 61st Cong, 2nd. Sess, p. 3321), there is little indication that this was his concern when making committee (not chair) assignments.

The insignificant policy defector coefficient in Equation (1) provides further evidence that Cannon was not focused on promoting the Republican platform during the 61st Congress, *ceteris paribus*. Although Equation (3) clearly suggests that the effect of the policy defector variable is attenuated by the .68 correlation that exists between policy defector and procedural defector, comparing Equations (1), (3), and (4) suggests that being a policy defector played a secondary role to being a procedural defector.¹³ Even though Cannon's staff prepared for him lists of those members who did not support him on the tariff, when it came to making committee assignments, Cannon was more concerned with whether a member supported his procedural powers than whether he voted against the party's position on Payne-Aldrich. Although collinearity likely contributes to the null finding in the fully specified equation, as can be seen by examining the estimates in Equation (3), all things equal, policy defections matter less than procedural defections.

Instead of using his control over the assignment process to promote the Republican agenda, Cannon used his power to punish those members who challenged his

¹² The policy defector and procedural defector variable correlate at .68. They correlate with the overall loyalty measure at .50 and .58, respectively.

¹³ The tolerance for policy defector is .47, whereas the tolerance for procedural defector is .57. This indicates that collinearity is not a serious problem for either variable.

leadership. Members who defected on key procedural votes about the organization of the House (procedural defector) were significantly less likely to receive a requested committee than otherwise.¹⁴ In short, Cannon used his power to protect his own political interests, rather than those of his party. Challenges to Cannon's leadership of a "procedural majority" (Jones 1968) appear more consequential than challenges to the GOP "policy majority."

Cognizant of his fragile grasp on power, however, Cannon took into consideration more than whether a member had supported stripping him of his power. During the 61st Congress, Cannon weighted endorsements more heavily than in the 58th Congress. Both the internal and external endorsement variables are statistically significant. As we suggested earlier, Cannon likely viewed endorsements as an indicator of a member's ability to build coalitions. The fact that the *substantive* effect of the internal and external endorsement coefficients are greater in the 61st than the 58th Congress might stem from Cannon's own precarious grasp on power.¹⁵ The fact that internal endorsements have a substantively greater effect than external endorsements in the 61st Congress, but not in the 58th, is another indication that Cannon's concern over his own position shaped his assignments in the 61st, but not the 58th. Undoubtedly, internal endorsements indicate a member's capacity to build coalitions that could eventually strip Cannon of his power.

In neither the 61st nor the 58th Congress did Cannon make an extra effort to assign self-proclaimed experts to relevant committees. Nevertheless, we are reluctant to point to this fact as an indictment of the information-based models of legislative organization. First, Cannon did indeed reassign members with previous committee service, and this tendency clearly enhanced the quality of the information that committees could deliver. Second, our measure of expertise is self-proclaimed experience or testimonials from those making assignment endorsements. Obviously, we, like Cannon himself, have no way of systematically ascertaining each individual member's true qualifications. Our use of testimonials to ascertain experience creates the potential for adverse selection. It is conceivable that Cannon discounted claims of experience because he recognized that

members would exaggerate their qualifications in order to secure a desired assignment. Finally, it is conceivable that Cannon ignored each member's previous experience because he was more concerned with appointing members who could add ideological balance to a committee roster than experience. Such a tendency would be consistent with an information-based model.

Conclusion

It has widely been assumed that speakers such as Joseph Cannon at the turn of the last century used committee assignments in part to maintain their own hold on power. As Rager explains, "Cannon realized that the key to exercising and retaining power as Speaker lay in his ability to appoint the members of all of the standing committees..." (1998, 67). Even Shepsle, who recognized that the portraits of Cannon as an unconstrained and manipulative leader were overblown, argued that Cannon manipulated committee assignments for his own purposes (1978, 22). Rager and Shepsle, like Follett, realized that at the turn of the century committee assignments were one of the tools that a strategic speaker would employ in part with an eye towards protecting their own power.

Our analysis of the 58th and 61st Congresses suggests that Cannon's ability to use committee assignments to further his and his party's policy goals was constrained by his need to protect the committee seats of senior members. Such results square with the findings of Katz and Sala (1996) that show that the committee seniority norm was institutionalized by the turn of the century. Indeed, the practice of allowing members to retain their assignments from the previous congress appears to have been so well entrenched that many senior Republicans correctly assumed that they did not even have to submit a formal request to be returned to their favored committees. During the 58th Congress, the evidence also suggests that he worked to ensure each committee's geographic diversity. It is the power of these constraints that has led some to question the extent to which Cannon arbitrarily exercised his power (Chiu 1928; Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist 1969) and others to portray Cannon as a "majoritarian" (Krehbiel and Wiseman forthcoming).

Although Cannon's actions were clearly constrained, it is also evident that he retained some discretion over the assignment of party members to committee slates. In short, the constraints that shaped the assignment process were not determinate, enabling Cannon to balance institutional and personal political goals, a portrait consistent

¹⁴Because a small proportion of the Republican caucus voted to strip Cannon of his procedural powers, strong statistical tests are likely to fail. Nevertheless, we uncover significant effects of defection on request success.

¹⁵Having an internal or an external endorsement increased a member's likelihood of success by 22.3 percent and 13.5 percent, respectively, holding other variables at their means. The parallel figures for the 58th Congress are 6.8 percent and 7.6 percent.

with Follett's portrayal of Speaker Reed's assignments. From our analyses of the cases where members were either new to the institution or sought to transfer committees, it is apparent that multiple factors influenced Cannon's decision-making. First, Cannon's choices were molded in part by the politics surrounding the assignment process. Students of committee assignments have suggested—but never systematically shown—that outsiders are able to shape assignment choices. The Cannon notebook enables us to test and affirm the hypothesis that even during an era when the speaker of the House had unilateral authority over the assignment process, assignment choices were shaped in part by lobbying over assignment decisions. During both the 58th and 61st Congresses, Cannon took into consideration the signals sent by actors both within and outside the institution.

What is perhaps most interesting about Cannon's assignments is that between the 58th and 61st Congresses, his needs and goals evolved. During the 58th Congress, he used his authority over assignments to promote the conservative agenda of the Republicans. During the 61st Congress, Cannon's focus changed. Rather than using assignments to promote those who were likely to be loyal to the party, Cannon used his power to protect his own position. During the 61st Congress, members who supported curbing Cannon's power paid a price when Cannon assigned new members and old members seeking transfers. During the 58th Congress, those who favored Cannon's selection as Speaker were not more likely to receive desirable assignments. These results confirm earlier suggestions that committee assignment patterns changed during the period (Jones 1968; Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist 1969; Stewart 1992; Brady and Epstein 1997).

Our analysis of new archival material from the Cannon period suggests that Cannon was strategic enough to vary his assignment criteria over time and by member. As the Republican coalition splintered by the 61st Congress, Cannon altered his own political strategies. Rewarding loyal partisans would be insufficient for retaining his position as party leader. Instead, cracking down on defectors from the Republicans' *procedural* majority became Cannon's goal, constrained by the limits imposed by a slowly institutionalizing House. Simplistic portraits of Cannon as someone who consistently manipulated assignments for his own gain or even as someone who was consistently constrained by either the chamber's preferences or institutional norms miss the sophisticated and systematic manner of how he dispensed opportunity and power.

Manuscript submitted January 10, 2000.

Final manuscript received January 15, 2001.

References

- Baker, John D. 1973. "The Character of the Congressional Revolution of 1910." *Journal of American History* 60:679–691.
- Bawn, Kathleen. 1998. "Congressional Party Leadership: Utilitarian versus Majoritarian Incentives." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 23:219–243.
- Bolles, Blair. 1951. *Tyrant from Illinois*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Brady, David, and David Epstein. 1997. "Intraparty Preferences, Heterogeneity, and the Origins of the Modern Congress: Progressive Reformers in the House and Senate, 1890–1920." *The Journal of Law, Economics & Organization* 13:26–49.
- Bullock, Charles S. III. 1970. "Apprenticeship and Committee Assignments in the House of Representatives." *Journal of Politics* 23:717–720.
- Bullock, Charles S. III. 1972. "Freshman Committee Assignments and Re-election in the United States House of Representatives." *American Political Science Review* 66:996–1007.
- Bullock, Charles S. III. 1973. "Committee Transfers in the United States House of Representatives." *Journal of Politics* 35:85–120.
- Canon, David, Garrison Nelson, and Charles Stewart III. 1998. *Historical Congressional Standing Committees, 46th to 79th Congresses, 1879–1947: House of Representatives, February 13*.
- Chiu, Chang-Wei. 1928. *The Speaker of the House of Representatives Since 1896*. New York: Columbia University.
- Clapp, Charles L. 1964. *The Congressman*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Clark, Champ. 1920. *My Quarter Century of American Politics*. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Cooper, Joe. 1970. *The Origins of the Standing Committees and the Development of the Modern House*. Houston: Rice University Studies.
- Cox, Gary, and Mathew D. McCubbins. 1993. *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Deering, Christopher J., and Steven S. Smith. 1997. *Committees in Congress*. 3rd ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Eulau, Heinz. 1985. "Committee Selection." In *Handbook of Legislative Research*, ed. Gerhard Loewenberg, Samuel C. Patterson, and Malcolm E. Jewell. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Fenno, Richard E., Jr. 1973. *Congressmen in Committees*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Follett, Mary Parker. [1896] 1974. *Speaker of the House of Representatives*. New York: Lennox Hills.
- Goodwin, George, Jr. 1959. "The Seniority System in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 55:412–436.
- Hasbrouck, Paul DeWit. 1927. *Party Government in the House of Representatives*. New York: Macmillan.
- Jones, Charles O. 1968. "Joseph Cannon and Howard Smith: An Essay on the Limits of Leadership." *Journal of Politics* 30:617–646.
- Katz, Jonathan N., and Brian R. Sala. 1996. "Careerism, Committee Assignments, and the Electoral Connection." *American Political Science Review* 90:21–33.

- Krehbiel, Keith. 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Krehbiel, Keith, and Alan Wiseman. n.d. "Uncle Joe Cannon: Majoritarian from Illinois." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*.
- Masters, Nicholas A. 1961. "Committee Assignments in the House of Representatives." *American Political Science Review* 55:345–357.
- Mowry, George. 1962. *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America, 1900–1912*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Norris, George W. 1946. *Fighting Liberal*. New York: Macmillan.
- Polsby, Nelson W., Miriam Gallaher, and Barry S. Rundquist. 1969. "The Growth of the Seniority System in the U.S. House of Representatives." *American Political Science Review* 63:787–807.
- Poole, Keith, and Howard Rosenthal. 1997. *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rager, Scott William. 1998. "Uncle Joe Cannon: The Brakeman of the House of Representatives, 1903–1911." In *Masters of the House*, ed. Roger H. Davidson, Susan Webb Hammond, and Raymond W. Smock. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Rohde, David W., and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 1973. "Democratic Committee Assignments in the House of Representatives: Strategic Aspects of a Social Choice Process." *American Political Science Review* 67:889–905.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. 1978. *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle: Democratic Committee Assignments in the Modern House*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sinclair, Barbara. 1995. *Legislators, Leaders, and Lawmaking: The House of Representatives in the Post-Reform Era*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Smith, Steven S., and Bruce A. Ray. 1983. "The Impact of Congressional Reform: House Democratic Committee Assignments." *Congress and the Presidency* 10:219–240.
- Stewart, Charles III. 1992. "Committee Hierarchies in the Modernizing House, 1875–1947." *American Journal of Political Science* 36:835–856.