Intergenerational Warfare: The Senate Decentralizes Appropriations

Most accounts portray the 1890–1910 period of congressional history as an exemplary instance of highly centralized party government. However, we contend that this interpretation obscures other important forces driving institutional development during this time. In 1899, the Senate approved a rule change dispersing jurisdiction over appropriations bills. This change added a significant centrifugal element to the Senate committee system. Taking advantage of new evidence, in particular a petition circulated by supporters of the reform, we assess competing explanations for the appropriations decentralization. We find that junior senators’ demands for increased access to power played an important role in this change. By contrast, partisan considerations played an insignificant role. The 1899 reform indicates the relevance of a causal variable that scholars have typically ignored: “intergenerational warfare” among members of Congress who differ in seniority level. Sectional differences were another key motivation for decentralization. This change, therefore, not only forces a reevaluation of the depiction of the turn-of-the-century Senate as a highly centralized institution, but also suggests the multiple kinds of coalitions that drive congressional development.

Introduction

On January 28, 1899, the Senate passed a rule change parceling out jurisdiction over appropriations bills among seven legislative committees. Ever since the House had divided control of appropriations among eight standing committees in 1879–85, rank-and-file senators had called for a similar diffusion of power in the upper chamber. The leaders of both parties resisted, but by 1899 the pressure for change became strong enough to force decentralization. The Agriculture, Commerce, Indian Affairs, Military Affairs, Naval Affairs, Pensions, and Post Office and Post Roads Committees acquired the privilege of reporting appropriations for matters in their jurisdiction. This left the
Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC) with jurisdiction over only a handful of areas, such as spending on the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Members of Congress and scholars have long understood that committee jurisdictions are a critical element of legislative politics (King 1997; Wilson 1885). Battles for jurisdiction are particularly important when they concern the budget process, since so much of politics comes down to matters of spending. It is no surprise, therefore, that members of Congress have repeatedly fought about jurisdiction over federal spending. However, it is surprising that political scientists have paid little attention to changes in the appropriations process in the Senate.

Although several authors note in passing the importance of the Senate reform (Goodwin 1970, 12; Haynes 1938, 458; Ripley 1969, 27; Robinson 1954, 296–98; Rothman 1966, 65–67; Smith and Deering 1990, 33–34), no one has systematically analyzed the causes or implications of the jurisdiction change.1 This inattention most likely stems from political scientists’ tendency to focus on the House when exploring congressional committee reform, and from the apparent lack of roll-call votes that would provide data for analyzing the Senate change.2 While there were several lengthy debates and numerous roll-call votes about the House appropriations change, the 1899 Senate change was approved on a voice vote after only brief discussion.

But there are compelling reasons to take a more detailed look at the Senate changes. First, the voice vote on final passage does not indicate the high stakes of the 1899 reform. Party leaders Nelson Aldrich (R–RI), William Allison (R–IA), and Arthur Pue Gorman (D–MD) aggressively fought the change and only relented after proponents made it clear they had the votes to pass it. As party leaders had feared, the 1899 change proved extremely important for the subsequent evolution of budget politics. From 1899 to 1922, it added a significant centrifugal force to the Senate and “in effect broke the power of the Appropriations Committee” (Robinson 1954, 298). Furthermore, unlike the House, which completely recentralized appropriations in 1920, the Senate returned only partial control to the SAC in 1922. The 1922 recentralization provided the following: those committees that formerly had appropriations power could put three of their own members on the SAC when programs within their jurisdiction came up for consideration. When the bills in question went to conference, these legislative committees could place one representative on the conference committee. The ex officio membership provisions meant that spending advocates on legislative committees would continue to
have privileged access to Appropriations Committee deliberations. Fenno (1966, 518) argues that the Senate compromise "perpetuated a direct substantive committee influence in the appropriations process." This system of shared control endured until the Congressional Budget and Accounting Act of 1974.

Second, the 1899 appropriations reform gives us the opportunity to study the dynamics of committee reform in the Senate, a topic that has received far less attention than has committee change in the House. The Senate’s smaller size and individualist ethos make it dangerous to assume that the same variables that drive reform in the House also explain changes in the Senate. Furthermore, the Senate often adopts institutional changes on voice votes after months of negotiation, or else these changes evolve slowly through informal shifts in practice. The resulting dearth of relevant roll-call votes hinders analysis of Senate changes, which makes it all the more critical to capitalize on the data that is available. We have found a petition that supporters of the 1899 change used to show their strength to party leaders. This provides new insight into the Senate decentralization.

Third, the literature on the decentralization of House appropriations provides a useful set of hypotheses that can serve as a starting point for analyzing the Senate change. The House reforms have been studied extensively (Brady and Morgan 1987; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Stewart 1989; Wander 1982). Wander (1982) and Brady and Morgan (1987) argue that these reforms stemmed from representatives' discontent with the House Appropriations Committee's stingy allocations to popular programs. According to this view, members decentralized appropriations to increase spending. Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991) disagree, arguing that the Appropriations Committee has never been a genuine "Guardian of the Treasury." Instead, they claim that the changes were primarily partisan. Majority party Democrats targeted the Appropriations Committee because it was chaired by Samuel Randall (D–PA), a dissident Democrat who had repeatedly used his influence to fight Democratic leaders' efforts to reduce tariffs.

Stewart (1989) offers the most detailed and nuanced account of the appropriations changes in the House. He argues that individual members' electoral goals generated recurring pressure to decentralize appropriations, particularly when it came to pork-barrel programs. Those seeking increased spending won a series of skirmishes in 1878–80, which shifted jurisdiction over appropriations for rivers and harbors and agriculture to the Commerce and Agriculture Committees, respectively. But this did not ease the pressure to decentralize. In 1885,
discontent with Appropriations’ stinginess intersected with Democratic leaders’ desire to limit Randall’s influence to produce a large-scale decentralization. In contrast to Kiewiet and McCubbins, Stewart downplays partisan concerns. His regression analyses suggest that party membership did not affect support for the change, controlling for region and membership on Appropriations. Interestingly, while Appropriations committee members naturally opposed decentralization, those members whose committees stood to gain jurisdiction were not more likely to vote for decentralization than were members who served on unaffected committees. Concerns about jurisdictional losses appear more salient than the potential for turf gains.

Finally, an examination of the 1899 change suggests an alternative interpretation of the turn-of-the-century Senate, which is typically depicted as a highly centralized, party-dominated institution (Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989; Brady and Epstein 1997; Mowry 1958; Ripley 1969; Rothman 1966). The foremost advocate of this view, David Rothman (1966, 48), argues that GOP leaders Allison and Aldrich had “secured tight control over Senate proceedings” by the late 1890s. Similarly, Brady, Brody, and Epstein (1989, 209) claim that “the Senate at the turn of the century was controlled by [Republican leaders] Aldrich, Allison, [Orville] Platt, and [John] Spooner.” Our account is not intended to refute the idea that party leaders played a substantial role in the turn-of-the-century Senate, but nonetheless adds an important qualification by highlighting forces of change that at times challenged the position of party leaders. The fight over decentralization in the Senate suggests the impact of differences in the number of terms that senators had served, a variable that scholars have largely ignored in their studies of congressional institutions. We show that the Senate appropriations reform was driven in part by junior senators who felt shut out from effective influence in the Senate. The number of terms served has a strong impact on support for the appropriations change, controlling for party, ideology, region, and even committee assignments. Junior members from both parties viewed themselves as a group with shared interests and worked together to pass an institutional innovation that they believed would promote those interests. Furthermore, decentralization was motivated by sectional interests: Senators from the South and West sought power at the expense of the Eastern elite. By dividing control of appropriations among more than sixty members, this generational and sectional coalition undermined senior party leaders’ ability to direct the Senate’s deliberations—a change inconsistent with a party government interpretation.
Historical Overview

Although reformers sought to decentralize control of Senate appropriations as early as 1879, and tried again in 1884, they failed because of opposition from senior committee leaders. Proponents of change renewed the struggle for decentralization in 1896 and nearly succeeded. But it took three more years of agitation before the Senate finally adopted the reform.

An examination of primary sources suggests the importance of junior senators’ desire for increased access to power. Although many senators in the late nineteenth century were trained by and responsive to political machines, a significant number were careerists who hoped to carve out power bases for themselves. As an indication of this nascent careerism, the average tenure of service in the Senate rose dramatically after 1875. By the 1890s it had reached levels comparable to those of the first half of the twentieth century (Ripley 1969, 43).

The 1896–99 debate over appropriations vividly illustrates junior members’ desire to participate equally in Senate deliberations. In 1896, Fred Dubois (R–ID) made the first proposal to decentralize appropriations. Newton Blanchard (D–LA) declared, “it is sought by this resolution to change the distribution of power in the Senate, to emancipate the Senate from the monopolistic dominance of about twenty men” who served on the Appropriations and Finance committees (Congressional Record (CR), February 4, 1896, p. 1288). Dubois added that, by custom, junior senators “are not expected to take much, if any, part in general debate. This leaves them ample time for committee work. By dividing the appropriations, their abilities could be utilized . . . I think that each member of the Senate should perform as much of the work, share as much of the care, enjoy as much of the honor, and be as much of a leader as possible” (CR, December 11, 1896, p. 133). Similar sentiments were voiced by Senators David Hill (D–NY), John Daniel (D–VA), Knute Nelson (R–MN), Jacob Gallinger (R–NH), and James George (D–MS), among others. These members believed decentralizing appropriations would make committees populated by junior members more potent. Gallinger argued that “with the proposed distribution, minor committees will become important and desirable. Some of the older Senators will stay on them, and there will be a greater sprinkling of new men on what are now leading committees, and in this way the new element, to which I belong, will be under proper influence and instruction” (CR, February 5, 1896, p. 1326).

This reference to the “new element” is intriguing. It suggests that junior members saw themselves as a group with interests distinct
from those of their senior colleagues. Press accounts also treat junior members in this way: the *Washington Post*, for example, noted that "the younger, newer blood in the Senate, which has no respect for traditions when those traditions are not in harmony with equality and fairness, has asserted itself with an emphasis which is not to be mistaken" (*Post*, February 5, 1896, p. 5; see also *Post*, February 8, 1896, p. 4). Thus, unlike many important changes in the House during this period, such as the 1890 adoption of the Reed Rules, the Appropriations reform pitted Republican and Democratic leaders against rank-and-file members drawn from both parties. This is a much different cleavage.

The Appropriations Committee's own behavior provoked further dissatisfaction. Members complained that the committee blocked floor amendments and that the few amendments adopted over committee opposition were routinely dropped in conference (CR, December 11, 1895, pp. 132–33; *Post*, February 5, 1896, p. 5). As a result, Appropriations became a natural target for members eager to weaken leadership dominance and distribute influence more broadly. Rothman (1966, 66) concludes that "no one intimate with Allison, Aldrich, or Gorman favored the [reform], but those cut off from power were more numerous and not altogether subservient."

Decentralization evidently had a sectional component as well. Dubois, the sponsor of the 1896 reform bid, was an Idaho Republican who strongly advocated free coinage of silver. His proposal attracted the votes of many western and southern senators, even though neither the West nor South was significantly under-represented on Appropriations. Dubois hatched the plan to decentralize appropriations in consultation with several other western silver Republicans (Graff 1988, 169–71). These westerners wanted to undermine conservative, eastern Republicans and bolster the power of their faction. Perhaps because western and southern members typically had policy views different than those of the dominant eastern wing of the GOP (see Cooper 1990; Sundquist 1983), they would benefit if conservative easterners lost the power base provided by the Appropriations Committee. In any case, the role of Dubois and his silver Republican colleagues, along with the disproportionate western support for reform, suggests the relevance of sectional interests.

Resistance to the 1899 reform emanated from Appropriations Committee members, who stood to lose considerable influence. They were joined by party leaders, such as Aldrich, who did not want to disperse power among numerous committees (Rothman 1966, 66–67). The Appropriations Committee, like the Finance Committee, was closely identified with the party leadership. Chaired by Allison, it also
included other top Republicans, such as Eugene Hale (R–ME), and the Democratic leader Gorman.

The reformers won a partial victory in February 1896, when the Senate voted 44 to 25 to sidetrack a deficiency appropriations bill and consider the Dubois proposal. Dubois had caught the leaders of both parties by surprise, and Aldrich, Allison, and Gorman worked to delay consideration of the measure while they lobbied members to oppose it. It initially appeared that Dubois would win easily (CR, February 4, 1896, p. 1277; Post, February 5, 1896), but over the next few days, party leaders made various appeals that convinced more than a dozen members to switch sides. On a 40-28 vote, the resolution was referred to the Rules and Administration Committee, which spelled its doom since all but one of the Committee’s members opposed the measure. The Post reported that a mix of “personal appeals,” “promises of various kinds,” “social considerations,” and “presidential politics” won converts to the leadership’s side (February 8, 1896, p. 4).

Although Allison, Aldrich, Hale, and Gorman continued to oppose decentralization in 1899 (Post, December 23, 1898, p. 4; Rothman 1966), they were not so successful. William Chandler (R–NH) introduced the decentralization resolution on the floor and threatened to force its consideration should the Rules Committee detain it for long. Chandler gathered the signatures of 46 senators—a majority of the full Senate—drawn almost equally from the two major parties, on a petition urging decentralization. Rather than allowing Chandler to bring the resolution to the floor, Aldrich had the Rules Committee limit its scope. The Appropriations Committee retained control of spending on foreign relations, the District of Columbia, and coastal fortifications, in addition to the few areas that Chandler had willingly left to the Committee. Aldrich then brought the resolution to the floor, where it passed on a voice vote. The compromise kept the basic idea of the Chandler proposal, but left the Appropriations Committee with control over a slightly greater share of the budget.

Party leaders’ failure to stem the reform tide in 1899, after having successfully done so just three years earlier, may derive from rank-and-file senators’ increased restiveness following a period in which GOP leaders enhanced their control of the legislative agenda. In 1897, Allison and Aldrich had consolidated their hold over the GOP’s formal party machinery. Allison took over the chairmanship of the party caucus and Steering Committee, and appointed his allies to other key posts. These moves appear to have exacerbated junior senators’ discontent with Senate organization (see Rothman 1966). Turnover also contributed to junior senators’ success in 1899. Nineteen of twenty-three new
senators signed the petition supporting the 1899 change, while departing senators had split nearly evenly on the issue in 1896.

This short narrative suggests the importance of seniority and regionalism, as well as the irrelevance of party ties, to this change. However, it is possible that the historical record obscures the true motivations behind decentralization. Member statements on the floor could have been nothing more than rhetoric. Press coverage might reflect misimpressions. Thus, we supplement this narrative with a quantitative analysis of the process of decentralization from 1896–99.

Data Analysis

Hypotheses

The historical narrative presented above suggests several hypotheses that can be tested in a quantitative analysis of the Senate appropriations decentralization. A few are obvious: members of the Senate Appropriations Committee are clearly expected to oppose the change, since it so directly weakened their power. By contrast, members of committees who would have “gained turf” through decentralization should have supported this reform. Given how decentralization appears to have been seen as particularly beneficial to junior senators—this “new element” that Gallinger spoke of—the length of a senator’s tenure should have a negative impact on support for the reform. The theoretical rationale for this hypothesis is that junior senators generally lacked access to top committee power bases in this era. As senators became increasingly careerist in the late nineteenth century (Ripley 1969, 43), this lack of access to power became intolerable. As Dodd (1977) and Price (1975) have argued with respect to the House, careerist legislators excluded from institutional power centers are likely to push for decentralizing changes.

We also expect that party affiliation will have no significant effect on support for decentralization, since there is little evidence from the primary sources that members perceived the change in remotely partisan terms. Because there was an identifiable sectional element to the debate, we hypothesize that representing a western or southern state will have a positive impact on support for the reform. We explore the meaning of this sectional dynamic below.

Variables

To test these hypotheses, we present two separate analyses, one of the votes on decentralization in the 54th Senate, and one of the petition in the 55th Senate. In the 54th Senate, there was a series of
five roll-call votes on the decentralization of appropriations. These were combined into a single index, coded 0 to 5, where 0 indicates that a senator never voted in favor of decentralization, and 5 indicates that a senator voted for decentralization through the entire series of roll calls.\textsuperscript{13} Twenty senators scored 0 by this measure, while twenty-four scored 5. The remaining fourteen were scattered in between, mostly toward the low end of the scale.\textsuperscript{14} Table 1 summarizes the five roll-call votes.

For the 55th Senate, we consider a signature on the Chandler petition to indicate support for reform. A total of 46 Senators signed the petition and were coded 1. All other senators who were members at the time that the petition circulated are coded 0. We rely on OLS regression to analyze the six-point dependent variable in the 54th Senate. In analyzing the 55th Senate, where the dependent variable is dichotomous, we rely on logit.

While the petition is unlikely to be an errorless indicator of support for reform, we have no reason to believe that the errors are correlated with our independent variables. Random error in a dependent variable will not bias estimated coefficients or standard errors.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, recent studies of the House have successfully used the decision to sign a discharge petition on proposed legislation as an indicator of underlying support for a measure (Binder, Lawrence, and Maltzman 1999; Krehbiel 1995). Since the Chandler petition was analogous in intent to a discharge petition, these studies reinforce our belief that signing the Senate petition indicated support for the decentralization. Finally, by using different dependent variables in the 54th and 55th Senates, we are able to check the robustness of our hypotheses.

Operationalizing the independent variables discussed above also entails some differences between the 54th and 55th Senates. Our measure of SAC membership in the 54th Senate is a simple dichotomy, where 1 indicates membership. However, when analyzing the 55th Senate, we substitute a variable called “top committee” for SAC membership. Top committee is also dichotomous, coded 1 if a member sat on the Appropriations or Finance Committee, and 0 otherwise. We make this substitution because a dummy variable only for SAC membership generates a massive negative coefficient with an infinite standard error in these logit analyses.\textsuperscript{16}

The other independent variables are operationalized in the same fashion in both analyses. In both Senates, our measure for gaining turf is whether a member sat on a committee that would have gained jurisdiction from decentralization.\textsuperscript{17} Our measure of congressional tenure is the number of Congresses in which a member had served.\textsuperscript{18}
TABLE 1
Roll-Call Votes Pertaining to Senate Appropriations Decentralization

| Description                                                                 | All Members |          | Republicans |          | Democrats |          |
|                                                                           | Yes  | No  | Yes  | No  | Yes  | No  |
| (1) Hale (R-ME) motion to consider deficiency appropriations bill           | 28   | 46  | 15   | 22  | 13   | 20  |
| (Feb. 4, 1896)                                                             |      |     |      |     |      |     |
| (2) Dubois (R-ID) motion to consider decentralization of appropriations     | 51   | 25  | 24   | 15  | 23   | 10  |
| (Feb. 4, 1896)                                                             |      |     |      |     |      |     |
| (3) Harris (D-TN) motion to adjourn (to put off consideration of rules change) | 37   | 33  | 17   | 18  | 20   | 13  |
| (Feb. 6, 1896)                                                             |      |     |      |     |      |     |
| (4) Faulkner (R-W.VA) to table amendment ordering Rules Committee to report favorably on decentralizing appropriations | 43   | 34  | 21   | 18  | 20   | 14  |
| (Feb. 7, 1896)                                                             |      |     |      |     |      |     |
| (5) Allison (R-I)A motion to refer rules change proposal to Rules Committee | 41   | 33  | 20   | 16  | 21   | 13  |
| (Feb. 7, 1896)                                                             |      |     |      |     |      |     |

Note: Votes include paired votes.

To measure party affiliation, we include a dichotomous variable, coded 1 for Republicans and 0 for Democrats and other parties. Sectionalism is measured with a dummy variable for the West and another for the South.¹⁹

Results

The results from the 54th Senate are presented in Table 2. As expected, SAC membership has a statistically significant negative impact on support for decentralization. The gain turf variable, which was expected to have a positive impact on support for decentralization,
TABLE 2
OLS Regression of Votes on Appropriations Decentralization in the 54th Senate
(standard errors in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAC member</td>
<td>-1.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( .91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain turf</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( .91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of terms</td>
<td>-.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( .08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( .54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>1.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( .60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>1.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( .54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.E.E.</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Dependent variable is coded from 0 (if a senator cast no votes in favor of decentralization) to 5 (if a member of Congress always voted in favor of decentralization). All hypothesis tests are one-tailed except Party. N=57.

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

is not statistically significant—a somewhat surprising result, though it is consistent with Stewart’s analysis of decentralization in the House. On the whole, it is clear that factors other than direct jurisdictions gains drove these votes on decentralization.

Instead, the number of terms served and regional variables play a critical role. As expected, the greater the number of terms a member has served, the less likely he is to support decentralization. *Ceteris paribus*, a senator who has served fourteen years, i.e., for seven Congresses, is expected to cast one-and-a-half fewer votes in favor of decentralization than would a complete newcomer.20 Both region
variables have their hypothesized effect. *Ceteris paribus*, a southern or western residence increases support for decentralization by approximately one vote. The null result for party is also consistent with our hypothesis and demonstrates quite clearly that decentralization transcended party lines, even in this era of vigorous party government.

We also replicate our model on each vote separately using logit. The results are substantively the same as when we examine the vote index (see the Appendix).\(^{21}\) The only major exception is that the gain turf variable is significant or borderline significant in several of these models. The effects of seniority and region are quite robust.

In addition, because of concerns about the suitability of using OLS to analyze the admittedly ordinal six-point vote scale, we replicated our analysis of this variable using ordered logit. Again, the results are the same as those presented above, with the sole exception that the gain turf variable is significant at the \(p < .10\) level in this specification (see Appendix).\(^{22}\) Thus, from this analysis of the 54th Senate, it appears that support for decentralization is largely a matter of seniority (or, more appropriately, the lack thereof), SAC membership, and region.

By and large, the same story emerges from a logit analysis of the fight over decentralization in the 55th Senate (see Table 3). As in the 54th Senate, membership on top committees had a statistically significant, negative impact on the probability of a member’s signing the petition. Likewise, the gain turf variable is of the correct sign but falls just short of statistical significance.\(^{23}\) The number of terms variable is significant and in the expected direction: more senior senators were less likely to sign the petition, *ceteris paribus*, than junior senators. The size of the coefficient suggests that a senator who had served 14 years would be about 30% less likely to support the decentralization than would a freshman senator.\(^{24}\) Party, as hypothesized, has no statistically significant impact. Of the regional variables, the South is significant and in the expected direction: southern Senators are more likely to have signed the petition. The West variable is in the expected direction and close to significance at the .10 level \((p = .108)\).\(^{25}\)

These initial results from the 54th and 55th Senates indicate the same basic lines of conflict over appropriations decentralization. Most striking may be what the story is not about. For one, this is not simply a case of committee members fighting to augment their jurisdictions. While members of top committees like Appropriations and Finance strongly opposed decentralization, membership on a committee that would gain from decentralization was generally not significantly related to support for this reform. As was the case in the House in 1885, the prospect of gaining jurisdiction was less of a motive than the fear of
### TABLE 3
Logit Analysis of Support for Appropriations Decentralization in the 55th Senate
(standard errors in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top committee</td>
<td>−1.65*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain turf</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of terms</td>
<td>−.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>1.41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−2 * log likelihood</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χ²</td>
<td>34.8***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Table entries are logit coefficients. Dependent variable is coded 1 if a senator signed the petition and 0 otherwise. All hypothesis tests are one-tailed except Party. N = 89.

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

jurisdictional losses. Another non-issue in this debate was party: Republicans were no more likely than Democrats to support reform, and vice versa. Thus, the battle over appropriations stands out as an institutional change not at all explained by the party government models often applied to this period (see, e.g., Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989; Brady and Epstein 1997; Cooper and Brady 1981). The fight over decentralization was more a kind of “class warfare,” a battle between the haves and the have-nots. Junior senators sought greater power at the expense of the Old Guard. Western senators sought greater power at the expense of Eastern potentates.\(^{26}\)
Alternative Explanations

An alternative explanation for the findings presented in Tables 2 and 3 is that both seniority and region are proxies for characteristics of the states electing these senators. In particular, it is plausible that recently admitted and rapidly developing western states were clamoring for increased appropriations to pay for public works projects. To the extent that the Appropriations Committee stood in the way of such projects, western senators had a concrete reason to favor decentralizing appropriations. Furthermore, western states also were hotbeds of populist sentiment. Since the populist program included several proposals for new spending, senators from states with strong populist movements might also be expected to favor decentralization.

To assess this explanation, we examine the impact of the log of the number of years that each state had been in the Union and, as a measure for populist strength, the share of the vote in each state that was received by General James Weaver, the Populist party candidate for President in 1892. As Model 4.1 shows, adding the log of years in the Union leaves essentially intact the impact of the number of terms and the South variable, but does greatly reduce the estimated effect of the West. Years in the Union is itself significant and in the predicted direction. Model 4.2 shows that adding the Weaver vote has no impact on the estimated effect of the number of terms, but does render the West and South variables insignificant. When both variables, years in Union and the Weaver vote, are included in Model 4.3, neither is significant, a result partly attributable to the collinearity of these two measures and the dichotomous region variables. However, even if both the West and South dummies are left out of the equation entirely (Model 4.4), neither years in Union nor the Weaver vote are significant at the .05 level, though both are of the correct sign and approach statistical significance. The number of terms variable remains significant in each specification.

To tease out further the sectional element of the decentralization fight, we incorporate into these models the second-dimension D-NOMINATE score for each senator. During the late 1800s, the second dimension is largely thought to capture the sectional argument over silver coinage and the gold standard (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, 100–06). Thus it could plausibly have some explanatory power, given the apparent relevance of sectionally based divisions to the appropriations decentralization fight. While Poole and Rosenthal (1997, 50) find that there were no issue areas in the 54th and 55th Senates where adding a second dimension resulted in a notable reduction in error, an examination
### TABLE 4
OLS Regression of Votes on Appropriations Decentralization in the 54th Senate, with Additional Measures of Regionalism (standard errors in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Model 4.1</th>
<th>Model 4.2</th>
<th>Model 4.3</th>
<th>Model 4.4</th>
<th>Model 4.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAC member</td>
<td>-.112</td>
<td>-.99</td>
<td>-.105</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>-.129#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td>(.98)</td>
<td>(.98)</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.03#</td>
<td>.006</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.55</td>
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<td>1.51</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Dependent variable is coded from 0 (if a senator cast no votes in favor of decentralization) to 5 (if a senator always voted in favor of decentralization). All hypothesis tests are one-tailed except Party.

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; #p < .10.
of these two Senates using their VOTEVIEW software shows several
dates—particularly relating to the currency issue—where the "cut line"
divides senators along a second dimension.

When we add the second-dimension NOMINATE in Model 4.5, we find that it is a significant predictor of support for the appropri-
ations decentralization. While the number of terms once again remains
significant, the West, South, years in US, and Weaver vote variables
are each insignificant. More generally, the second-dimension NOMI-
NATE has a significant effect in both the 54th and 55th Senates, no
matter what combination of the other variables are included.28 Along
with the number of terms, it is the most robust predictor of support for
the Appropriations decentralization. The second NOMINATE dimen-
sion appears to offer a more precise measure for sectionally based
divisions than do such rough measures as the Weaver vote or a dummy
variable for western residence.29

These results—which also characterize the 55th Senate—show
that the "intergenerational" cleavage between junior and senior sena-
tors is quite robust.30 It is not likely an artifact of some unmeasured
characteristic of the states electing these junior senators.31 At the same
time, the impact of the Weaver vote, years in Union, and the second-
dimension D-NOMINATE scores demonstrates the sectional component
of the decentralization battle. The estimated effects of the South and
West variables reported in Tables 2 and 3 most likely reflect the deep
cleavages over economic development policy that divided the
advanced, industrialized Northeast and upper Midwest from the more
agrarian South and West (see Bensel 1984 on the importance of
sectionalism in American political development). It was not western
or southern residence per se that led these senators to support decen-
tralization; rather, it was the drive for policies more in tune with the
interests of their still-developing states. Hungry for federal funds to
fuel regional development, western and southern senators were
particularly eager to curb conservative eastern party leaders’
Appropriations Committee power base.

We therefore conclude that the appropriations decentralization
was both an intergenerational battle between junior and senior senators
and a sectional battle pitting the less developed West and South against
the more economically advanced Northeast and upper Midwest. The
"have-nots"—junior senators and members from the West and South—
sought a greater share of power from the senior, conservative Old Guard
leaders who controlled the Appropriations Committee and the
Republican leadership apparatus.
Discussion

Scholars have often portrayed the turn-of-the-century Congress as the high-water mark for party government in congressional history (Aldrich 1995; Cooper and Brady 1981). While attention has focused mostly on the Czar-like influence of Speakers Thomas Reed (R–ME) and Joseph Cannon (R–IL) in the House, many believe that the Senate also exhibited a form of party government during these decades (Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989; Brady and Epstein 1997; Mowry 1958, 115; Rothman 1966; Ripley 1969; Smith and Deering 1990, 34; but see Cooper 1990).

But the Senate appropriations change—which party leaders fiercely opposed—is problematic for partisan models and should prompt a reevaluation of the turn-of-the-century Senate. No sooner had Allison and Aldrich consolidated their hold over the Senate GOP machinery in the mid-1890s, than resistance to their control mounted. This resistance provided the impetus for the 1899 change. Conditional party government models (Aldrich and Rohde 1995; Cox and McCubbins 1997; Rohde 1991) generate the prediction that the majority party will centralize control of the legislative process when it becomes more unified. But in this case, even as Senate Republican homogeneity was reaching its highest levels in modern times (see Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989; Brady and Epstein 1997), the Senate adopted a decentralizing reform that undercut party leader William Allison’s Appropriations Committee power base.

Although the appropriations decentralization still left party leaders with several important power levers, it did help spread power among a greater number of members. The resulting Senate authority structure embodied conflicting imperatives: unlimited debate, a strong seniority system, dispersed control of appropriations, and a high degree of overlap between party and committee leaders. Rather than a coherent, party-based system, it appears instead a complex, multifaceted institution that at once elevated party, committees, and individual members in mutually contradictory ways.

The more general point to take from the appropriations decentralization is that many different types of coalitions shape legislative institutions. No single kind of coalition or type of member interest uniquely determines congressional organization. Although party-based coalitions often played an important role in the 1890s, the appropriations decentralization suggests the potential for alternative types of coalitions to pursue contrary interests.32 Junior senators were motivated most directly by the ambition to exercise power, while other senators were motivated by sectional interests. The dummy variables for the West and South, along with the Years in the Union, Weaver
vote, and second-dimension NOMINATE variables, each tap into the division between the industrialized East and upper Midwest, and the less economically developed South and West. In sum, decentralizing control of appropriations proved attractive to junior senators interested in increased access to power and to westerners and southerners eager for federal funds to fuel their regions’ development.

On the whole, our analysis of the Senate’s 1899 decision to decentralize appropriations not only points to a reevaluation of the degree of centralization and leadership dominance attained in the turn-of-the-century Senate, but also suggests that analyses of institutional development should not be confined to a single interest.

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APPENDIX

Logit Analysis of Each Vote on Appropriations Decentralization in the 54th Senate

(standard errors in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Vote 1</th>
<th>Vote 2</th>
<th>Vote 3</th>
<th>Vote 4</th>
<th>Vote 5</th>
<th>All Votes (ordered logit)</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Top committee</td>
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<td>-3.52*</td>
<td>-1.82*</td>
<td>-1.44#</td>
<td>-1.62#</td>
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<td>(1.52)</td>
<td>(1.08)</td>
<td>(.94)</td>
<td>(1.08)</td>
<td>(1.98)</td>
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<td>2.45*</td>
<td>1.19#</td>
<td>1.52#</td>
<td>1.59#</td>
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<td>(1.20)</td>
<td>(.86)</td>
<td>(1.00)</td>
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<td>-.25*</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
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<td>-2 * log likelihood</td>
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<td>56.6</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>107.4</td>
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<td>37.5***</td>
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</table>

Note: Table entries are logit coefficients. Dependent variable is coded 1 if a senator cast a pro-decentralization vote and 0 otherwise. All hypothesis tests are one-tailed except Party.

*Threshold estimates not shown.

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; #p < .10.
NOTES

We appreciate the helpful comments of Bruce Cain, Jonathan Cowden, Greg Koger, David Mayhew, Tim Nokken, Nelson Polsby, Brad Palmquist, Steven S. Smith, Rick Wilson, Ray Wolfinger, and participants in the Faculty Research Workshop in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. We also thank Charles Stewart, Keith Poole, and John Lapinski for sharing their data. A previous version of this paper was presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.

1. Rothman (1966) attributes the change to resentment towards the growing power of party leaders, while Robinson (1954) claims that the reform stemmed from senators’ anger at the Appropriations Committee’s domineering attitude. But neither author attempts to analyze the causes of the change systematically.

2. Other aspects of institutional reform in the Senate have received much more attention in recent years. See, for example, Binder (1997), Binder and Smith (1997), and Dion (1997, chapter 7) on rules concerning unlimited debate, and Gamm and Smith (1999) on the development of the Senate’s formal leadership.

3. See Smith (1993) and Swift (1996) for examples of important changes in Senate operations that were not the direct subject of roll-call votes.

4. This is not to say that all historians and political scientists view the turn-of-the-century Senate as party-dominated. See, for example, Cooper (1990) and Sundquist (1983) for accounts that emphasize regional divisions among Republicans. However, in the 55th Senate, when the Appropriations decentralization passed, party voting was near its all-time high (see Hurley and Wilson 1989).

5. Rothman (1966, 58) adds that “Allison and his supporters dominated the Senate working committees as effectively as the party organization.” The few dissenters “could hardly affect the exercise of power. The country might honor their names but the Senate barely felt their presence” (60).

6. See Gamm and Smith (1999) for evidence that Senate party leaders did not have firm control of the agenda in these years. For evidence on party agenda control in the House, see Schickler and Rich (1997a, 1997b).

7. Though we focus on seniority in this case, various case studies of institutional change in 1890–1910 demonstrate the impact of other forces besides party (see Schickler n.d.).

8. One might argue that this change is orthogonal to the question of party government because it simply redistributed power within each party rather than between the parties. However, conditional party government theory asserts that majority party leaders are empowered with greater agenda powers when majority party members have homogeneous policy preferences (Rohde 1991). This change reduced the resources of majority party leaders even as the majority Republicans achieved an unprecedented level of homogeneity on policy issues (see Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989).

9. The 1896 proposal increased the turf of roughly three-quarters of all senators. The compromise version adopted in 1899 reduced this number but still provided additional jurisdiction for a healthy majority.

10. The Senate Rules Committee appears to have played the role of a leadership-allied control committee in the late nineteenth century, a role that its House counterpart has played for much of its history (see Oppenheimer 1977 on the House Committee).
11. Presidential politics played a role because it was believed that to "dislodge Mr. Allison from the control of the Appropriations would be a censure upon him which would seriously handicap him in his Presidential aspirations" (Washington Post, February 8, 1896, p.4).

12. Chandler had proposed that Appropriations keep its jurisdiction only over the legislative, executive, and judicial; sundry civil expenses; and deficiencies bills.

13. We included paired votes in constructing this variable. A sixth roll call occurred on a motion to adjourn at the start of the session on February 7, 1896. The motion was defeated 21–52 and was opposed both by leading proponents of decentralization (Dubois, Blanchard) and leading foes of the proposal (Aldrich, Allison, Gorman). That roll call therefore does not appear to be a valid indicator of support for decentralization.

14. One drawback of this measure is that it includes only those senators who cast a vote in all five roll calls. The 34 who did not, become missing data. However, replications of this analysis on each individual vote generated similar results (see the Appendix).

15. The chief sponsor of the petition, William Chandler, was a New Hampshire Republican. It is plausible that Chandler sought signatures first from his fellow partisans and from New Englanders. But the absence of a significant effect for party and the relative paucity of New Englanders signing the petition makes this seem unlikely. In any case, the Senate has always been a relatively small, informal institution. As a result, it is likely that Chandler and his allies were able to cast about widely for signatures.

16. Because none of the members of the SAC signed the petition, the variable is in essence a perfect predictor of whether a senator signed the petition. A simple bivariate logit, where \( \text{SIGNPET} = F(a + b^* \text{SACMEMB}) \), needs to obtain a value of 0 when \( \text{SACMEMB} = 1 \), since, again, none of the SAC members signed the petition. For the cumulative density function to approach zero, the coefficient must be close to negative infinity. The resulting standard error will also be essentially infinite, making the result impossible to interpret. Because three of the thirteen members of Finance signed the petition, the top committee variable generates an interpretable result. And because the variable is still skewed heavily towards opposition to decentralization, it captures the flavor of a simple dummy for the SAC. We also replicated our analyses using OLS and the SAC dummy variable, which does produce interpretable results. Those results were substantively similar to the logit results we present here. Finally, we also replicated the analysis, deleting all members of SAC (and thus leaving out the top committee variable). Once again, the results for the remaining variables remained unchanged.

17. In the 54th, members of the SAC were automatically coded 0. In the 55th, members of either the SAC or Finance Committee were coded 0. Overall, a large majority of both Senates, 70 members in the 54th and 64 in the 55th, stood to gain turf by this measure. When we operationalized gaining turf as an ordinal variable—the number of committees that a member sat on that would have gained control of appropriations—the results were substantively similar.

18. Since our historical discussion of the decentralization emphasizes a cleavage between junior and senior senators, one might think a dichotomous measure of tenure would be more appropriate, despite the difficulties of determining the correct cut-point. Thus, in our analysis both the 54th and 55th Senates, we replaced the interval measure of seniority with a binary version of "Number of Terms," which was coded 1
if a senator had served one six-year term or less, and 0 if they had served more than one term. The results were substantively the same.

19. Identifying which states are appropriately considered part of the "West" is difficult in this era. We coded the West to include California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

20. An anonymous reviewer suggested that the seniority result might be an artifact of the amount of time a Senator's state had been in the Union. We tested this hypothesis using a logged and unlogged version of the number of years each state had been part of the US. Although the bivariate correlations between these two measures and seniority are significant, neither operationalization notably affected the coefficient for seniority. Admission to the Union does, however, bear on the interpretation of the West variable and will therefore be discussed below.

21. Unfortunately, SAC membership is a perfect predictor of several of the individual votes. Therefore, as in our analysis of the 55th Senate, we substitute "top committee" for SAC membership in the logit and ordered logit results presented in the Appendix.

22. We also replicated the analysis reported in Table 2 using grouped logit. The results were unchanged: the SAC member and number of terms variables were negative and significant. West and South were both positive and significant. Party and gain turf were insignificant.

23. Part of the reason that this variable does not fare well is that there are few senators who did not serve on SAC and yet also did not stand to gain some jurisdiction under decentralization. In any case, however, these members did not behave significantly differently than did non-SAC members who did stand to gain jurisdiction. Of the thirteen senators who did not serve on SAC and did not stand to gain jurisdiction, seven (54%) signed the petition, compared to 62% of the 63 senators who stood to gain jurisdiction. This difference is not statistically significant ($p > .10$).

24. The precise size of the effect depends on the value of the other independent variables. Based on the coefficient estimates in Table 3, if one sets each independent variable at zero, the expected probability of a new senator signing the petition is 55.5%, while the expected probability of a fourteen-year veteran signing is 21.3%.

25. Note that results are not complicated by problematic levels of multicollinearity. We regressed each independent variable on the other independent variables in the model and none produced high r-squareds.

26. Another potential predictor of decentralization is member ideology. One might suspect from Wander (1982) and Brady and Morgan's (1987) accounts of the 1885 House change that members who favor higher spending would tend to support decentralization. In modern times, this would presumably mean liberals, as measured by roll-call indices of member ideology, such as Poole and Rosenthal's (1997) first-dimension D-NOMINATE scores. But in the late nineteenth century, NOMINATE scores—along with other ideology measures—do not map clearly onto opinions about spending. For example, conservative Old Guard Republicans often favored increased government spending in order to justify their top priority, high tariffs. Thus, it is not surprising that when the first-dimension NOMINATE score is included in the models presented in Tables 2 and 3, it is insignificant and does not change the other results appreciably. One might explain this null result as the result of collinearity, since the
first dimension is highly correlated with party. However, even when party is dropped, the first dimension score is insignificant. Since we were dissatisfied with the NOMI-
NATE measure as an indicator for fiscal conservatism, we created an alternative measure by searching the roll-call record for any vote related to appropriations. We coded individual members as adopting the pro-spending or the anti-spending position on each roll call. We combined votes on these issues into a single index of fiscal conserva-
tivism. This variable had no effect on support for decentralization. We also experi-
enced with Heckman and Snyder’s (1996) five factor scores for each Senate in place of NOMINATE scores. The results were the same as those reported so far and those reported below, largely because the first and second Heckman and Snyder factors scores correlate highly with first- and second-dimension NOMINATE scores ($r > .90$). The other three factor scores were never significant in any model.

27. An anonymous reviewer suggested this robustness check.

28. We also constructed a more direct measure of members’ attitudes towards the currency issue by combining three votes on free silver in the 54th Senate into an index. While the index is significant when added by itself, as in Models 4.1–4.2, it is not significant when other measures of sectionalism are included. Moreover, including it in Model 4.5 does not change the results appreciably: the seniority and NOMI-
NATE-2 measures are still significant.

29. A series of path models conducted with these variables demonstrates that, while the Weaver vote and the silver roll-call index (see note 28) have no direct impact on support for decentralization, they do have an indirect impact through their associa-
tion with NOMINATE-2. In these models, constraining the Weaver vote, the silver vote index, as well as the log of years in the Union to have no direct effect on support for decentralization does not significantly worsen the model’s fit. However, constrain-
ing the direct effect of NOMINATE-2 to zero does worsen the fit. Thus, it does appear that the NOMINATE-2 score captures policy-related issues having to do with Popu-
lism and free silver, but that our measures of populism and free silver have no impact on support for decentralization, net of NOMINATE-2.

30. Replicating these models in the 55th Senate produced similar results. The “top committee” and number of terms coefficients were all significant across specifica-
tions. The log of years in US variable is of the correct sign but is not significant when entered alongside the Weaver vote variable. The Weaver vote measure is in the predicted direction and is statistically significant. Again, NOMINATE-2 is the strongest predictor. In a replication of Model 4.5, it is the only regional proxy that attains significance at the .05 level.

31. We also considered whether senators were motivated to support decentrali-
zation by the onset of direct primaries and other mechanisms to provide greater popular control over Senate elections. Lapinski (1999) argues that the onset of direct elections had important effects on Senate organization in the twentieth century. However, as of 1899, only three states (Georgia, Nevada, and South Carolina) had adopted reforms to circumvent state legislatures’ control of senate elections. Nevertheless, we did attempt to gauge Progressive sentiment in the states during the 1890s. Drawing upon a Senate study in 1909 (S. Doc. 603), we constructed two measures, one capturing the timing of the reform, i.e., when the direct election was instituted, and the other capturing the extent of the reforms. The rather tenuous assumption is that states with earlier and/or greater reforms would have experienced more nascent Progressivism in the 1890s.
Neither of these measures proved to have any explanatory power. In both bivariate and multivariate contexts, neither was significantly associated with support for decentralization in either the 54th or 55th Senate.

Indeed, an examination of recent Senate history suggests that the 1899 case was far from an anomaly. In particular, junior senators spearheaded another series of reforms in the 1970s that once again dispersed power in the upper chamber. Junior senators formed a bipartisan group that met regularly to consult on reform proposals. In 1975, this group passed rules changes requiring open committee meetings and allocating additional committee staff assistance for junior senators. Two years later, many of the same junior members successfully pushed for the Stevenson committee reform proposal, which limited the number of chairmanships that individual members could hold, thereby spreading these power bases among more members. Seniority, far more than party, structured members’ voting on each of these reforms (see Schickler n.d. for an analysis of these changes).

REFERENCES


