

Giving the Minority Credit: Restrained Majority Party Agenda Control in the House of Representatives

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Scholars and observers understand the U.S. House of Representatives to be a strongly majoritarian legislative chamber, with rules and processes empowering a unified majority party to exercise near-absolute negative agenda control, determining what bills will and will not see consideration on the floor. (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Finocchiaro and Rohde 2008; Gailmard and Jenkins 2007; Monroe and Robinson 2008). Without the formal procedural powers enjoyed by minority party senators (Smith 2014), members of the House minority have little recourse to the exercise of agenda control by the majority. Thus, scholars of congressional parties generally expect the majority to monopolize the House floor agenda, and eliminate opportunities for minority party lawmakers to advance policy proposals to the benefit of the minority's electoral or policy goals (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; D. R. Mayhew 1974; Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing 2014).

Yet, the minority is afforded opportunities for influence in the House (Green 2015; Wolfensberger 2002). The data in Figure 1 show that minority party lawmakers sponsor surprising shares of the bills and amendments considered on the floor of the House of Representatives. Specifically, from 1981-2016 (the 97th-114th congresses), 17.23% of bills receiving a House passage vote were sponsored by members of the minority party. Moreover, these shares have increased in recent years, not decreased, as the majority party has become more unified and allocated more agenda setting power to its party leaders (Aldrich and Rohde 2000; J. M. Roberts and Smith 2003; Theriault 2008). From the 97th Congress (1981-83) to the 114th Congress (2015-17), the share of bills receiving a vote that were sponsored by a member of the minority party nearly doubled, from 12.45% to 23.71%.

In this paper, we ask: *Why, and under what conditions, does the majority cede agenda space to minority party lawmakers?* For all their strengths, existing theories of party agenda setting power do not provide a basis for understanding when and why the majority party will allow the minority opportunities to advance bills. And while other scholarship focuses primarily on the motivations and efforts of the minority party to engage in congressional action (Green 2015; J. A. Jenkins, Provins, and Monroe 2016; C. O. Jones 1970),

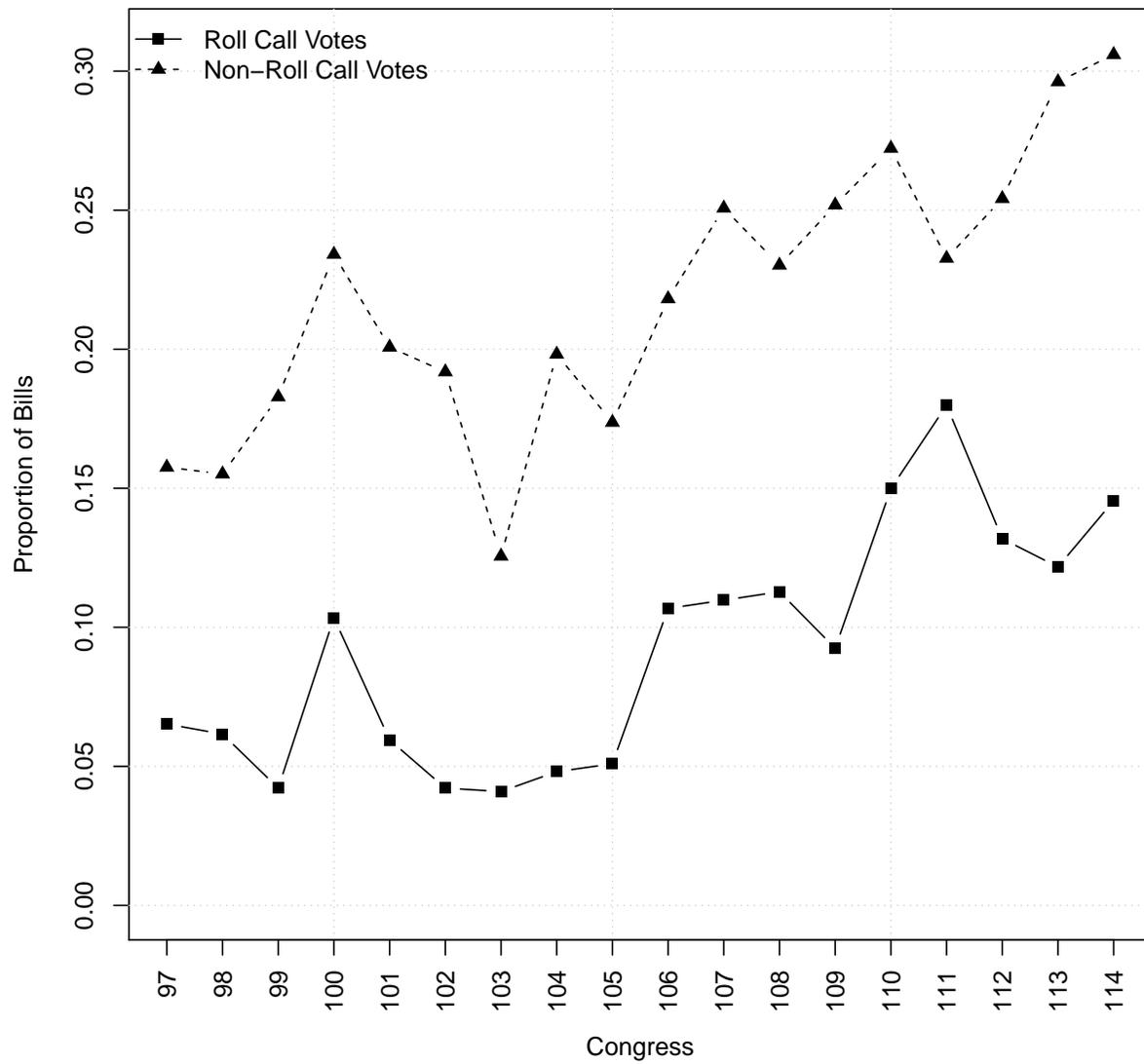


Figure 1: Proportion of bills reaching a vote which were introduced by a member of the minority party.

little attention has been paid to the majority’s incentives to allow the minority influence or agenda space (*cf.* Krehbiel, Meirowitz, and Wiseman 2015). Here, we argue the majority provides the minority with opportunities due to the under-appreciated ways majority party power is restrained by (1) heterogeneous parties and related multi-dimensional nature of congressional politics, and (2) the super-majoritarian nature of the broader congressional policymaking process. These facets of congressional politics ensure that the majority frequently needs minority party support to advance policy proposals beyond the House and enact laws. Therefore, the majority cannot completely shut out the minority, but instead must maintain functional working relationships with minority party lawmakers.

Nonetheless, and consistent with existing scholarship on congressional parties, the majority is *strategic* in its allocation of agenda space to the minority. It attempts to cede plenary time to minority party members in ways that will cause the least harm to the majority party’s interests. Drawing on a dataset of every bill sponsored by members of the House minority party receiving floor consideration between 1981-2016, we find that the majority largely doles out agenda space to minority party lawmakers who are (1) typically more moderate in the policy proposals they advance, but who (2) represent less competitive districts. In other words, the majority attempts to thread the needle between giving relatively moderate minority party members opportunities to advance bills it likely finds less objectionable on policy grounds, but without giving minority party members from swing districts too many opportunities to credit claim. We also find some evidence that (3) the majority may allocate some agenda space to ideologically extreme members of the minority party, perhaps trying to embarrass the minority for supporting extreme-sounding proposals.

These findings have important implications for how we conceptualize majority party agenda power in the U.S. Congress. They suggest that the majority party’s procedural control over the agenda is not enough to ensure its substantive domination of it. They also suggest that, contrary to many partisan theories, the majority does not exercise its agenda power to purely partisan ends. Finally, these findings point to enduring *minority* party power, even in the contemporary, party-polarized House of Representatives.

Perceptions of Minority Party Power

Scholars of congressional parties argue the majority party has overwhelming control over the floor agenda in the House of Representatives. Cox and McCubbins (2005) argue the majority forms a procedural cartel to monopolize the agenda and use it to further the party’s interests—primarily establishing a positive record of legislative accomplishments and blocking proposals that run counter to the majority’s interests. Other work reinforces this view of the majority party’s control of the agenda. For instance, Monroe and Robinson (2008) and Harbridge (2015) find the majority uses its procedural control over the floor to favor action on more

partisan-learning bills. Finocchiaro and Rohde (2008) find the majority’s control over the agenda is even stronger in eras—like the contemporary era—when the majority party is more homogenous.

Indeed, scholarship on party power creates the impression of a minority party that is irrelevant in House policymaking. As Green (2015, vii) characterizes this perspective, “The House minority party is a neglected stepchild, assumed to be a single-minded seeker of majority status without importance or influence.” In other words, scholars generally expect that when the majority is determined to impose its will, “the House minority can forget about participating in anything significant” (Jacobson 2017, 132).

While scholarship on majority party agenda control does not predict the minority party will *never* be given floor agenda space, it also does not provide a basis for understanding when or why the minority *will* be given floor agenda space. Allowing minority party lawmakers to advance their sponsored proposals runs counter to majority party goals in at least two ways. First, it can help the minority electorally and directly at the expense of the majority. Minority party members can use the consideration of their bills as credit claiming opportunities (even if they do not pass), which, in turn, can bolster their reelection efforts (D. R. Mayhew 1974; Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing 2014). In the zero-sum two-party politics of American elections (F. E. Lee 2016), allowing minority party members opportunities to bolster their election hopes undermines the election hopes of the majority party’s candidates in those same districts.

Second, allowing floor time to minority party proposals risks allowing the minority to shape public policy, and the tenor of national debates, in ways that run counter to the majority’s wishes. When afforded opportunities to make a splash in Congress, the minority often does not work to advance broadly supported measures. Rather, it tries to undermine the majority (F. E. Lee 2016) and influence the roll-call record in order to make Congress appear more partisan, polarized, and gridlocked (Egar 2016), which can in turn undermine public faith in the majority party and Congress as an institution (E Scott Adler and Wilkerson 2013; D. R. Jones 2010; D. R. Jones and McDermott 2010; Ramirez 2009). Moreover, as Green (2015) shows, minority parties also use the opportunities afforded to them to try to force the majority into compromises on legislative substance that are more favorable to the minority’s policy preferences.

Majority Party Incentives to Empower Minority Lawmakers

So, then, why does the majority allocate agenda space to members of the minority party? We argue they do because the majority often needs minority party votes to advance its legislative agenda beyond the House. Single-party lawmaking is simply not as easy as it seems, even in the majoritarian House (Curry and Lee 2019), and the minority party, consequently, has more leverage than typically appreciated (Green 2015; Hughes 2018;

Krehbiel, Meirowitz, and Wiseman 2015; J. A. Jenkins, Provins, and Monroe 2016; Wolfensberger 2002). At least two facets of congressional politics underscore this intuition: (1) under-appreciated heterogeneity within the parties combined with the multi-dimensionality of congressional politics, and (2) the constitutional structure of the policymaking process. Combined, these factors sustain minority party relevance, even in highly partisan eras. The majority party cannot simply run roughshod over the minority, but must make concessions and maintain a functional working relationship with minority party members in order to achieve legislative goals.

Heterogeneous majorities and multi-dimensional politics

Congressional majority parties today are less unified than they seem. Compared to parliamentary systems, the individualized election of members of Congress from geographically distinct districts and states results in congressional parties that are far more heterogeneous. Having to please local constituents for election survival, there are few reasons to expect members of Congress will enthusiastically vote against their individual electoral interests to help the party (Carson et al. 2010; D. R. Mayhew 1974).

Moreover, high-levels of observed party unity are, in part, a function of a strategic construction of the roll-call record by both parties (Clinton 2012; Egar 2016; Gelman 2017; F. E. Lee 2016) which can overstate internal agreement within the parties and disagreements between them (F. E. Lee 2009). While some roll-call based measures present congressional politics as operating largely in a single-dimensional policy space (*e.g.*, Gentzkow and Taddy. 2016; K. T. Poole and Rosenthal 2001; 2011), recent scholarship suggests congressional policymaking is far more multi-dimensional (Aldrich, Montgomery, and Sparks 2014; Ballard 2019; Crespin and Rohde 2010; Marchi, Dorsey, and Ensley 2017; J. M. Roberts, Smith, and Haptonstahl 2016). Not only are the parties frequently divided on policy questions, but some policy coalitions are more bipartisan than others.

As a result, congressional parties have developed extensive strategies try encourage party loyalty (Evans 2018; Ballard, Lerner, and Minhas 2019; Dynes and Reeves 2018; Grynaviski 2010; Pearson 2015), even controlling and withholding information about legislative proposals to keep backbenchers on the party line (Curry 2015). Nevertheless, these efforts are costly and not guaranteed to succeed. Despite collective interests that bind partisans together, parties often still pay a steep price in keeping moderates in line (Jenkins and Monroe 2012; Lynch and Roberts 2016). Indeed, Rubin (2017) documents the difficulty intra-party factions and dissent create for the majority as it tries to enact its agenda. In recent years, we have seen this play out in the Republican Party's struggles to keep its right wing (*i.e.*, the Freedom Caucus) in line, while Democrats have struggled to move their agenda against Blue Dog recalcitrance. Generally, even today's majority parties

frequently struggle to build sufficient intra-party unity to enact an agenda (Curry and Lee 2018).

The Constitutional Structure and Policymaking

The constitutional structure of our policymaking institutions and processes further disrupts party influence. Under most circumstances, bipartisan and super-majoritarian coalitions are necessary to overcoming the various veto-points imbedded into the process (Curry and Lee 2019; Krehbiel 2010; D. Mayhew 2005).¹ The separation of powers between Congress and the President raises the bar for successful lawmaking action, especially under divided government [Cameron (2000)]. Bicameralism also makes one-party lawmaking difficult (Sarah A Binder 2003; 2014), as the different modes of election and apportionment between the House and Senate can easily put them out-of-sync, especially following wave elections. Additionally, super-majoritarian cloture requirements in the Senate either ensure a place for the minority at the negotiating table or contribute to gridlock (Sarah A Binder and Smith 2001; Koger 2010; Smith 2014; Wawro and Schickler 2013). While these bicameral factors extend beyond the dynamics of just the House, House majority parties considering how to move their agenda through the broader policymaking process will need to consider them. Moreover, the majority may want to co-opt minority party support early in the legislative process in order to inoculate itself against minority party attacks (Steven J Balla 2002) early on, rather than wait until later in the process. Indeed, Curry and Lee (2019) find that lawmaking votes remain as bipartisan today as they were in the 1970s, and today's disciplined and unified majority parties are no more adept than parties of less party-unified eras at advancing their partisan agendas. Bipartisanship, and support from the minority party, is almost always necessary to make a law.

Strategic Allocation of Agenda Space to the Minority

For the above reasons, bipartisanship is far more common and necessary in the House of Representatives than is typically appreciated, and consequently, the majority needs to work with and cultivate minority party votes on most lawmaking efforts. Nonetheless, we should expect, consistent with existing work on congressional parties, that the majority party will be strategic in its allocation of agenda space. After all, it maintains a procedural monopoly over the floor, and will want to maximize its electoral, power, and policy advantages within the constraints it faces. In other words, the majority will try to strike a balance between conceding some agenda space to the minority and preserving its interests. That strategic behavior may manifest in three ways:

¹@reynolds2017exceptions documents the various exceptions to super-majoritarian requirements in the Senate that can expedite one-party lawmaking, but indeed these are exceptions rather than the rule.

Policy Convergence

Forced to concede some agenda space, one strategic approach would be for the majority to offer floor time primarily to more moderate proposals offered by more moderate minority party members that majority party members find more appealing. While the parties disagree on many issues and policies, there is more bipartisan agreement than it often seems (Harbridge 2015). And some issue areas demonstrate more bipartisan agreement than others. While the majority could conceivably re-introduce any minority party lawmaker sponsored legislation or amendment it agrees with and pass it as a majority party sponsored measure, repeated use of this strategy could lead to a backlash from minority party lawmakers. Moreover, such a strategy would sap the majority of opportunities to cede some floor time to the minority without having to allow proposals majority party members are more vehemently opposed to on the floor.

Conceptually, then, we should expect minority party sponsored bills closer to the majority party's policy preferences, either in general or within a policy area, to be more likely to be considered on the House floor.

Electoral Considerations

At the same time, we should expect the majority to be wary of the electoral consequences of to whom it allocates agenda space. Allowing bills and amendments sponsored by minority party lawmakers from competitive districts to be considered and passed in the House could help them defeat challengers from the majority party by providing those members with salient credit claiming opportunities (D. R. Mayhew 1974; Grimmer 2013; Grimmer, Westwood, and Messing 2014), hurting the majority's chances at preserving or expanding its collective majority. As such, we should expect to see minority party lawmakers from *less* competitive districts to be more likely to have their bills considered on the House floor.

Partisan Attacks

Lastly, we might expect some subset of agenda space allocated to the minority party to be made not in good faith, but for the majority to score political points against the minority. The majority may from time to time provide agenda space to minority party sponsored bills with the intention of highlighting party differences in ways that are favorable to the majority. This can include putting extreme-sounding, unpopular, or poorly-conceived minority-sponsored bills on the floor with the goal of making the minority look irresponsible, out of touch, or incompetent. It could also involve putting minority sponsored bills on the floor that divide the minority while unifying the majority. Consequently, we might expect to see more extreme minority party bills/amendments, sponsored by more extreme members of the minority, to be more likely under some circumstances to be considered on the floor, but not necessarily passed or adopted.

Data and Methods

In our analysis, we consider all 44,054 bills and joint resolutions—those measures which have the force of law, if passed—sponsored by a member of the minority party in the House of Representatives in the 97th-114th Congresses (1981-2016). To operationalize our independent variables of interest and covariates for our statistical models, we incorporate data from a number of sources: The Congressional Bills Project (E. Scott Adler and Wilkerson 2018), PIPC Roll Call data (Crepsin and Rohde 2018), and Voteview DW-NOMINATE scores (Lewis, Poole, and Rosenthal 2017), all for the 97th-114th Congresses.

Using these data sources, we test our hypotheses about the minority party’s access to floor time for measures its members sponsor. We estimate two sets statistical models. In the first, each observation is one bill introduced in the House of Representatives. In the second, observations are individual bill sponsors in each Congress (*i.e.*, bills are aggregated to the sponsor level).² In our bill-level analysis, the dependent variable is a binary indicator for whether the bill received a final passage vote on the House floor, indicating that it received floor time and consideration.³ In our sponsor-level analysis, we use two different dependent variables: 1) the *proportion* of each sponsor’s bills reaching a vote and 2) the *number* of bills proffered by each sponsor reaching a vote.

We operationalize each of our three hypotheses—about policy convergence, electoral considerations, and partisan attacks—in the same ways for both the bill-level and sponsor-level analyses. For *policy convergence*, we take the difference between the sponsor’s first dimension DW-NOMINATE score and the median DW-NOMINATE score for the majority party in that Congress. We expect to find that as this value increases, minority-sponsored bills will be less likely to receive a final passage vote, since the sponsor’s policy preferences are less similar to those of the majority party. Because members are more divergent from the majority party as this measure increases, rather than convergent, we call this measure *Policy Divergence* in our analyses.

For *electoral considerations*, we use the absolute value of the normalized Democratic share of the two-party presidential vote in the most recent presidential election in the sponsor’s district, which we call *Electoral Safety*. Higher values of this measure indicate safer districts in which the sponsor is less likely to face a strong challenger. As such, we expect that bills sponsored by minority party members from safer districts (higher values of electoral safety) will be more likely to receive a final passage vote.

For *partisan attacks*, we first take the difference between the sponsor’s first dimension DW-NOMINATE score and the median of their own party in that Congress. We then interact this difference with a dummy

²Members of the House who did not sponsor any bills are not part of this analysis.

³We consider a bill to have received a final passage vote if it is considered via *any* type of passage vote: a roll call vote, voice vote, or vote without objection. Much of the literature to date focuses solely on roll call votes, but as we are interested in when any plenary time is ceded to the minority party, we also include non-roll call votes.

variable for whether a member’s DW-NOMINATE score is more extreme than the median of their party (more negative for Democrats, more positive for Republicans). The resulting measure gives us an indication of how different sponsors are from their own party in an ideologically extreme direction. If the majority party cedes agenda space to the minority in order to make the minority look bad or to divide the minority by giving more extreme members space for their proposals, then we would expect bills whose sponsors have higher values on our *Partisan Attack* measure to be more likely to get final passage votes for their bills.

For our bill-level analysis, we estimate Equation (1) for bill i in Congress j with simple logistic regression:

$$\text{Vote}_{ij} \sim \text{Policy Divergence}_{ij} + \text{Partisan Attack}_{ij} + \text{Electoral Safety}_{ij} + \mathbf{s}_{ij} + \mathbf{c}_j + \epsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

Here, \mathbf{s}_{ij} is a vector of sponsor/bill-level covariates, and \mathbf{c}_j is a vector of Congress-level covariates. The sponsor/bill-level covariate we use are 1) *Republican*, a dummy variable for whether the sponsor is a Republican, 2) *Seniority*, the number of terms the sponsor has served, 3) *Party Leader*, a dummy variable for whether the sponsor is a member of the party leadership, 4) *Days to Election*, the number of days which the bill was introduced before the next federal election, 5) *Committee Member*, a dummy variable for whether the sponsor was on a committee to which the bill was referred, 6) *Cosponsors*, the number of members who cosponsored the bill, 7) *Legislative Effectiveness*, the sponsor’s legislative effectiveness score (from Volden and Wiseman 2018), and 8) *Unity Score*, the sponsor’s party unity score.⁴

The Congress-level covariates we use are 1) *Party’s Unity Score*, the average party unity score of the sponsor’s party in Congress j , 2) *Party Difference*, the absolute value of the difference between the median first dimension DW-NOMINATE scores of each party in Congress j , and 3) *Majority Size*, the difference between the number of seats held by the majority party and the number of seats held by the minority party. Together, these covariates help account for a number of important institutional and political factors that should affect whether a bill (from the minority party) receives a vote in the House of Representatives (e.g. the level of broad support within the chamber—*Cosponsors*—and the sponsor’s general ability to effect policy change—*Legislative Effectiveness*), which will allow us to better isolate the effects of our main variables of interest.

For our sponsor-level analysis, we estimate Equations (2) and (3) for sponsor k in Congress j via OLS regression:⁵

$$\text{Proportion Voted}_{kj} \sim \text{Policy Divergence}_{kj} + \text{Partisan Attack}_{kj} + \text{Electoral Safety}_{kj} + \mathbf{S}_{kj} + \mathbf{c}_j + \epsilon_{kj} \quad (2)$$

⁴A member’s party unity score is the proportion of unity votes—defined as a vote on which more than half of one party votes in opposition to more than half of the other party—on which that member voted with the majority of their party.

⁵Results do not differ if we use a Poisson or Negative Binomial count model to estimate Equation 3.

$$\text{Number Voted}_{kj} \sim \text{Policy Divergence}_{kj} + \text{Partisan Attack}_{kj} + \text{Electoral Safety}_{kj} + \mathbf{S}_{kj} + \mathbf{c}_j + \epsilon_{kj} \quad (3)$$

Here, \mathbf{S}_{kj} and \mathbf{c}_j are vectors of sponsor/bill-level and Congress-level covariates, respectively. The Congress-level covariates are identical in both analyses. \mathbf{S}_{kj} differs from its bill-level counterpart, \mathbf{s}_{ij} , because we use summary metrics in three cases due to aggregating to the sponsor level: the average number of days before the next election that the sponsor’s bills were introduced, the average number of cosponsors for each sponsor’s bills, and the proportion of bills introduced by each sponsor for which the sponsor sat on a referring committee. We also include the number of bills sponsored by each member as a covariate in the sponsor-level analysis.

Results

Bill-Level Analysis

The results of our bill-level model, the estimation of Equation (1), can be found in Table 1. These results provide evidence in favor of two of our hypotheses. First, if a minority-sponsored bill’s sponsor was farther from the majority party ideologically, that bill was less likely to reach a final passage vote on the House floor (*Policy Divergence*, $\beta = -1.687$, $p < 0.001$). Further, bills sponsored by minority party members from safer electoral districts were more likely to come to a final passage vote (*Electoral Safety*, $\beta = 0.821$, $p = 0.011$). However, we did not find support for the hypothesis that the majority will allow bills that would divide or make the minority look bad. Bills sponsored by a more ideologically extreme member of the minority party were less likely to come to a final passage vote (*Partisan Attack*, $\beta = -2.226$, $p < 0.001$).

The model covariates generally fit with the discipline’s understanding of Congressional behavior, as well. Bills sponsored by a member who sat on a committee to which the bill was referred were more likely to receive a vote, reflecting the institutional power afforded to committee members with policy purview over a bill (*Referral Committee*, $\beta = 0.216$, $p < 0.001$). Bills with more cosponsors were more likely to receive a floor vote, since more cosponsors indicates broader support from the chamber (*Cosponsors*, $\beta = 0.011$, $p < 0.001$). Bills sponsored by members with higher legislative effectiveness scores were more likely to receive a final passage vote, since such members are more adept at pushing their preferred policies along the legislative process (*Effectiveness*, $\beta = 0.867$, $p < 0.001$). Bills sponsored by minority party members who have higher party unity scores than their party’s average are more likely to reach a final passage vote, perhaps indicating that the minority party provides more support for bills from more loyal party members (*Unity Difference*,

$\beta = 0.117, p < 0.001$). Additionally, fewer minority-sponsored bills reach a vote on the House floor when the two parties are more ideologically distinct (*Party Difference*, $\beta = -1.75, p = 0.154$), and bills sponsored by minority party leadership are more likely to reach a final passage vote than those sponsored by rank-and-file minority party members (*Leader*, $\beta = 0.148, p = 0.223$), though the effect size is not statistically significant. However, we do uncover two potentially surprising relationships. First, sponsor seniority is negatively related to the likelihood that a minority-sponsored bill reaches a final passage vote—though the coefficient is positive (*Seniority*, $\beta = -0.051, p < 0.001$). It could be that the effect of seniority on legislative effectiveness is picked up by the latter variable. Further, bills introduced by the minority party farther from an election are less likely to reach a final passage vote (*Days to Election*, $\beta = -2e-04, p = 0.076$). From previous research we would expect that the majority would allow fewer minority-sponsored bills to reach a vote closer to an election, as the minority would be more likely to use such success to credit claim on the campaign trail. Perhaps, though, minority-sponsored legislation is less substantively important closer to an election, allowing the minority to credit claim while not being too damaging to the majority’s goals. The number of days before an election in which the legislation was introduced is also a coarse measure. A better one might be the date on which a measure receives a vote, though this would select on our dependent variable.

Finally, while we do control for party differences (with the *Republican* dummy variable) and party cohesion (with the *Party’s Unity Score* variable), we do not have strong theoretical reasons to expect a particular relationship between either and the success of minority-sponsored bills. Of the 18 Congresses in our sample, each party is the minority in 9, and while there are more measures in our sample sponsored by Democrats (22,661) than Republicans (21,393), we do not at present have an explanation for the small but significant positive coefficient (*Republican*, $\beta = 0.532, p < 0.001$). There are plausible arguments leading to an expectation of either a positive or negative relationship between the minority party’s mean unity score and our dependent variable, so the positive and significant (though small) coefficient is unsurprising (*Party’s Unity Score*, $\beta = 0.109, p < 0.001$).

While Table 1 provides us with information about the direction and statistical significance of the relationship between our main independent variables and whether a bill received a final passage vote, we do not yet know the substantive strength of these relationships. As such, we run simulations based on our model output to illustrate how varying each of our three main independent variables affects the probability that a minority-sponsored bill received a final passage vote in the House.

First, we take 1000 simulations of our model output from a multivariate normal distribution where the mean is a vector of the coefficients from the model in Table 1 and the variance is the variance-covariance matrix

Table 1: Bill-level logistic regression predicting whether bills introduced by the minority party reach a final passage vote.

Policy Divergence	-1.687*** (0.278)
Electoral Safety	0.821** (0.323)
Partisan Attack	-2.226*** (0.536)
Republican	0.532*** (0.101)
Seniority	-0.051*** (0.007)
Leader	0.148 (0.121)
Days to Election	-0.0002* (0.0001)
Referral Committee	0.216*** (0.053)
Number of Cosponsors	0.011*** (0.0004)
Effectiveness	0.867*** (0.036)
Unity Difference	0.117*** (0.013)
Party's Unity Score	0.109*** (0.016)
Party Difference	-1.750 (1.227)
Nagelkerke Pseudo R-squared	0.859
Observations	38,360
Log Likelihood	-6,619.596
Akaike Inf. Crit.	13,271.190
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

from the same model. We then set up three scenarios—one for each main independent variable—where we vary one variable of interest from its minimum to maximum values, while holding all other model variables at their means. Then, we use the data from our scenarios to predict the probability that a minority-sponsored bill received a final passage vote, based on our model simulations. These predicted probabilities can be found in Figure 2.⁶

As shown in the left panel of Figure 2 (*Policy Divergence*), we find that bills sponsored by minority party members who were most ideologically similar to the majority party were 7.2 percentage points more likely to receive a final passage vote than bills sponsored by minority party members who were least ideologically similar to the majority party. In other words, bills sponsored by the most moderate minority party members were 6.55 times more than likely to be considered on the floor than those sponsored by the most extreme minority party members. As shown in the middle panel of Figure 2 (*Electoral Safety*), bills sponsored by minority party members in the most competitive House districts were 1.2 percentage points less likely to receive a final passage vote than bills sponsored by minority party members in the least competitive House districts. In other words, bills sponsored by minority party members in the least competitive districts were 1.46 times more likely to be considered on the floor than those from minority party members in the most competitive districts. As shown in the right panel of Figure 2 (*Partisan Attack*), bills introduced by the most ideologically extreme members of the minority party were 4.5 percentage points (or 6 times) less likely to receive a vote than bills introduced by the least ideologically extreme members of the minority party. In context, these are substantial changes: just 4.72% of all minority-sponsored bills in our sample receive a final passage vote.

Sponsor-Level Analysis

Results from our sponsor-level models, predicting the proportion and number of each sponsor’s bills that reached a final passage vote, can be found in Table 2. As we can see, the aggregated results provide similar evidence in favor of our policy divergence and electoral safety hypotheses. Unlike the bill-level analysis, the sponsor-level analysis provides some evidence in favor of our partisan attack hypothesis.

Minority party members who are less ideologically similar to the majority party got a smaller proportion of their sponsored bills to a final passage vote, as well as fewer total bills (*Policy Divergence*). At the same time, minority party members from safer House districts got a larger proportion of their sponsored bills to a final passage vote, and also sponsored a greater number of bills which received a final passage vote (*Electoral Safety*). Here, we also find some support for our *Partisan Attack* hypothesis. While there is almost

⁶For both the bill-level and sponsor-level analyses, predicted probabilities and values for all independent variables can be found in the appendix.

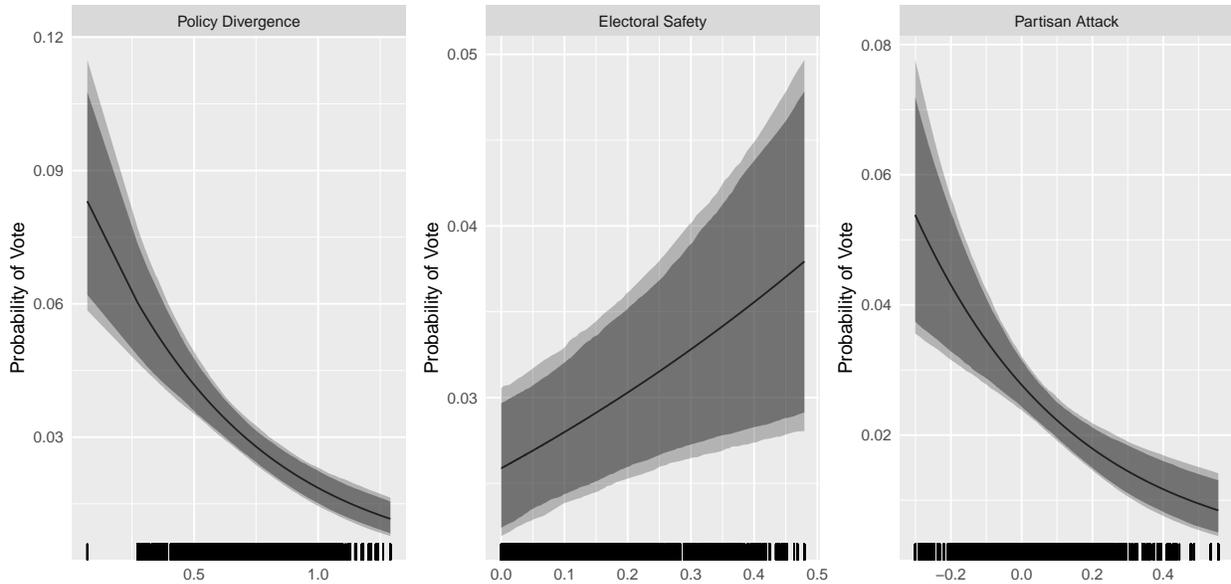


Figure 2: Predicted probability that a bill receives a final passage vote based on varying main independent variables from their minimum to maximum values. The dark gray shaded area represents the middle 90% of predicted probabilities and the light gray shaded area represents the middle 95% of predicted probabilities.

no relationship between ideological extremity within the minority party and the proportion of each minority sponsor's bills which reached a final passage vote, there is a positive relationship for the *number* of bills which reached a final passage vote. Further, this relationship approaches statistical significance ($\beta = 0.49$, $p = 0.134$).

In most cases, the models predicting the proportion (column 1 of Table 2) and number (column 2 of Table 2) of bills sponsored by each minority party member which received a final passage vote have the same coefficient sign and similar level of statistical significance for each independent variable. However there are also variables for which the coefficient sign and/or level of significance differs between models. One such variable is party leadership. There is a small and non-significant negative relationship between being a party leader and the proportion of bills which reached the floor and a small and non-significant positive relationship between being a party leader and the number of bills which reached the floor. The relationship we find for minority party leaders is the same as the relationship we find for more senior members of the minority party.

The only other variable for which there is a different relationship with the proportion and number of bills which reached the floor is the average number of cosponsors. Minority party members who had more cosponsors for their bills, on average, had a lower proportion of their bills to a final passage vote and also got fewer bills to a final passage vote in total, though the former is not statistically significant.

Table 2: OLS regression predicting the proportion (column 1) and number (column 2) of each minority party member's bills that reach a final passage vote.

	DV:	
	Proportion (1)	Number (2)
Policy Divergence	-0.082*** (0.023)	-0.771*** (0.173)
Electoral Safety	0.100*** (0.026)	0.683*** (0.195)
Partisan Attack	0.001 (0.043)	0.490 (0.327)
Republican	0.010 (0.008)	0.177*** (0.060)
Seniority	-0.0003 (0.001)	0.001 (0.004)
Leader	-0.006 (0.010)	0.039 (0.078)
Average Days to Election	0.001*** (0.0001)	0.006*** (0.001)
Referral Committee	-0.00002 (0.00002)	-0.0002 (0.0002)
Average Cosponsors	-0.002 (0.008)	-0.219*** (0.064)
Effectiveness	0.113*** (0.005)	1.738*** (0.035)
Unity Difference	0.004*** (0.001)	0.046*** (0.007)
Number Sponsored	-0.004*** (0.0002)	-0.020*** (0.002)
Party's Unity Score	0.004*** (0.001)	0.044*** (0.009)
Party Difference	-0.147 (0.095)	-0.958 (0.720)
Observations	2,085	2,085
R ²	0.269	0.585
Adjusted R ²	0.263	0.582
Residual Std. Error (df = 2068)	0.087	0.658
F Statistic (df = 16; 2068)	47.523***	182.064***

Note:

15 *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

As with the bill-level results, we must also consider the substantive significance of our results. While OLS regression is easier to interpret than logistic regression, the process by which we created predicted values for our bill-level results is still useful for our sponsor-level analysis. This process allows us to not only assess the substantive significance of our results in terms of the range of the dependent variable, but to consider model uncertainty in our substantive results and show the effect of variables with different units as well.

Using the same process we employed to produce predicted probabilities for our bill-level analysis, we produce predicted values for each of the dependent variables in our sponsor-level analysis based on varying our three main independent variables.⁷ These predicted values can be found in Figure 3.

The predicted values in Figure 3 confirm the results in Table 2, and in most cases the results are substantively meaningful. From the minimum to maximum values of *Policy Divergence*, the proportion and number of bills sponsored by each minority party sponsor decreases 0.07 and 0.59, respectively.⁸ While these may not seem like substantively large changes, they are when considering the range of the dependent variables. The mean proportion of bills reaching a vote from all minority party sponsors is 0.062 (the median is 0), and the mean number of bills that reached a vote from all minority party sponsors is 0.615 (the median is also 0). In each case, the predicted change over the range of *Policy Divergence* spans more than 10 quantiles of the range of the dependent variable.

The substantive effects of *Electoral Safety* are similarly important. From the minimum to maximum values of *Electoral Safety*, the proportion and number of bills sponsored by each minority party sponsor decreases 0.048 and 0.32, respectively. Each spans more than 5 quantiles of the range of the dependent variable. For *Partisan Attack*, there is no substantively meaningful effect on the proportion of bills which reached a vote, as the predicted change from the minimum to the maximum values of *Partisan Attack* is 0.002, less than 1 quantile of the range of the DV and a change of less than one percentage point. There is, however, a predicted increase of 0.40 in the number of bills which reached a vote among minority sponsors from the minimum to maximum values of *Partisan Attack*, a change of more than 5 quantiles of the dependent variable.

Discussion and Conclusion

Existing theories of party influence provide little explanation for when or why the majority party would allocate floor agenda space to members of the minority party. In giving minority party members' opportunities to have their bills considered (and sometimes passed) on the floor, they allow members of the opposition

⁷The only difference between the predictions in the bill-level analysis and the predictions in the sponsor-level analysis is that in the sponsor-level analysis we do not pass the predictions through a link function. In the bill-level analysis they are passed through a logistic link function.

⁸These figures do not consider the portion of the predictions below 0, as these are outside the possible empirical range of the dependent variables.

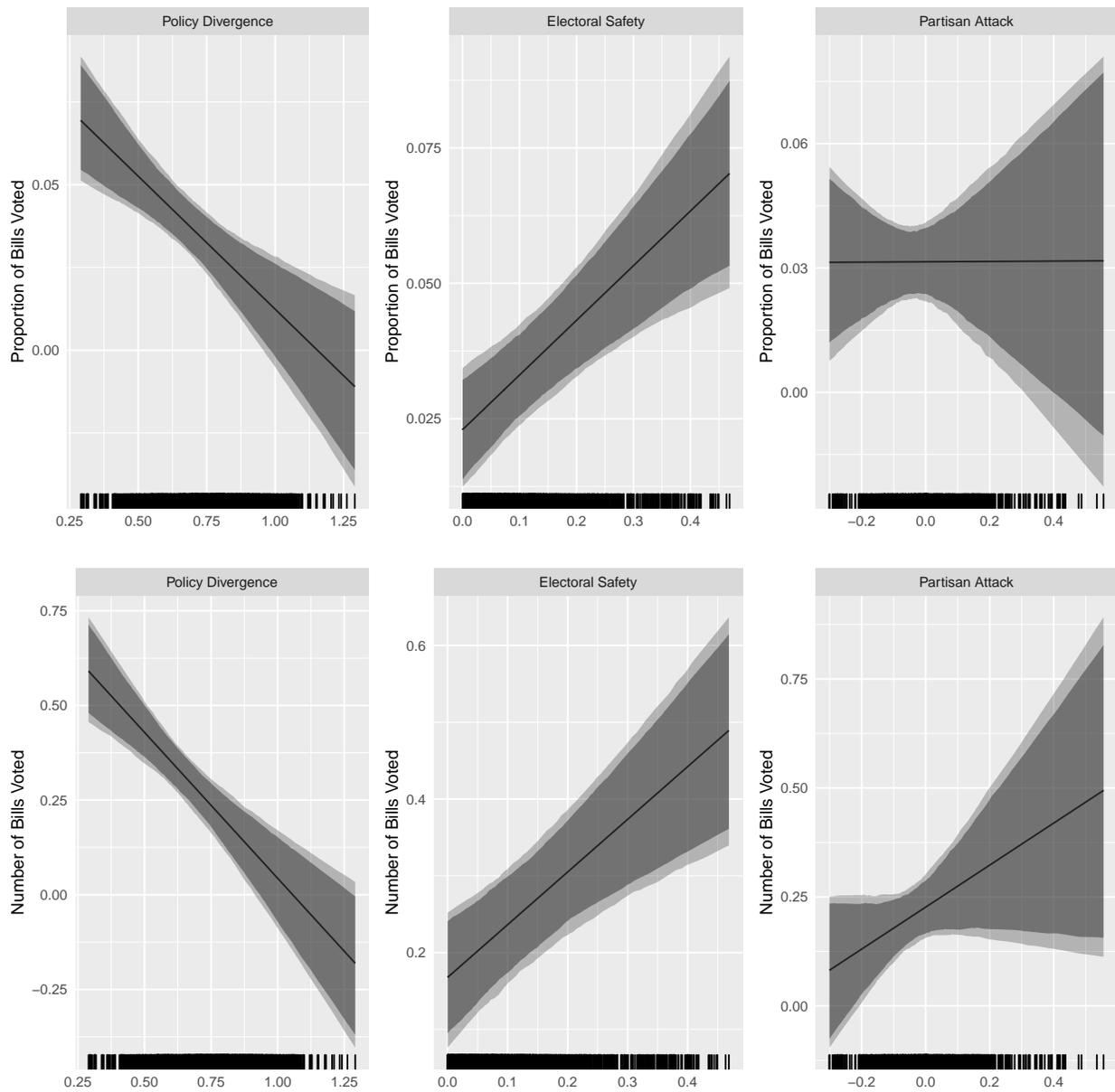


Figure 3: Predicted proportion (top row) and number (bottom row) of each member's bills receiving a final passage vote based on varying main independent variables from their minimum to maximum values. The dark gray shaded area represents the middle 90% of predicted values and the light gray shaded area represents the middle 95% of predicted values.

opportunities to credit claim or to influence public policy. In this paper, we offer a possible explanation: the majority must play nice with the minority because it will need minority party votes to move aspects of its agenda into law, however, the majority will act strategically, seeking to minimize the damage to majority party interests when it allows minority party bills to be considered on the floor.

Our analyses find evidence of this strategic behavior. When the majority schedules minority party bills on the floor, it seeks to minimize damage to both the majority's policy and electoral interests. Using data on all minority party sponsored bills from 1981-2016, we find that minority party bills sponsored by more moderate minority party members, and minority party members from less competitive districts, are more likely to receive floor time than those from more ideologically extreme minority members or those in competitive districts that the majority may wish to flip in the next election. In this way, the majority gives floor time to the minority, and can claim to have played nice, but does so in ways that minimize damage to the majority's goals. We find less support for our partisan attack hypothesis—the possibility that the majority schedules extreme minority party proposals in order to embarrass the minority party. While more extreme minority party members get more total bills on the floor than less extreme minority party members (Table 2, column 2), the effect is not statistically significant, and support results are not found in our other tests.

These findings have important implications for how we think about party agenda power in the majoritarian House of Representatives. Majority party agenda control, and the majority's monopoly over the agenda, does not mean the majority dominates the floor in a purely partisan fashion to purely partisan ends. The majority cannot just ignore the minority and give all agenda space to the majority party members. It has to be sensitive to minority party's wishes and provide minority party members with some opportunities for legislative action. Rather, majority status gives a party the opportunity to decide which minority party bills will receive consideration, and it is able to do so strategically. Undoubtedly, the set of bills the majority party allows minority party members to advance is different from that that would have been advanced were the minority party in power, this is a softer conception of majority party agenda dominance than typically portrayed in theories of party power.

These findings suggest more minority party relevance than many theories of majority party power (*e.g.*, Cox and McCubbins 2005), but align nicely with recent work on the importance of minority party activities (*e.g.*, Green 2015; F. E. Lee 2016). The minority is not a “neglected stepchild” in the politics of the House of Representatives. Beyond offering opposition to the majority's agenda, the minority is allocated significant space to shape what passes the chamber. Despite the majority party's absolutely control over the floor agenda, the minority gets a substantial share of the bills considered on the House floor, and is able to affect what passes. Even in today's party-polarized era, the minority still has influence of legislative action in the House.

Future research should further consider the nature of minority party influence, and the agenda space allocated to the minority. Do the same strategic factors influence which minority party amendments are made in order on the House floor under restrictive special rules controlled by the majority party? What explains how much overall agenda space is allocated to the minority in a Congress, and why has the share of floor bills sponsored by the minority party increased over time? Future iterations of this research project will consider these questions.

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