

Negative Agenda Control and the Conservative Coalition in the U.S. House

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Abstract

From the late-1930s through the mid-1980s, a “conservative coalition” of Southern Democrats and Republicans sometimes formed on floor votes in the House of Representatives. While it is widely believed that such a conservative coalition acted as a barrier to many liberal policy initiatives, a fully fleshed-out picture of what the conservative coalition was and how it operated is lacking. Stated differently, the literature is quite consistent in describing the conservative coalition as an obstructionist entity – but the *nature* of the obstruction has rarely been examined in a systematic way. In this paper, we investigate whether evidence exists to suggest that the conservative coalition wielded *negative agenda control*, that is, whether it used positions of power in the House to block bills from floor consideration that would have harmed (or “rolled”) a majority of their members. We focus our investigation on a key moment in House history – the 1961 “packing” of the Rules Committee – which is often believed to have broken the southern blockade and opened the flood gates for liberal legislation on the floor. We find that the likelihood that the conservative coalition was rolled increased significantly after the Rules committee packing, and especially for bills that came from committees chaired by non-southerners. These results are consistent with the notion that Rules systematically protected that coalition from unfavorable floor votes, and that standing committee chairs continued to offer some protection once the Rules committee protection was eliminated.

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Introduction

From the late-1930s through the mid-1980s, a coalition of Southern Democrats and Republicans sometimes formed in the House of Representatives and influenced the course of policy making. The conventional wisdom in both journalistic and academic accounts is that this “conservative coalition” acted as a barrier to many liberal policy initiatives proposed by Northern (non-Southern) Democrats. By the late-1980s, however, the foundational basis of the conservative coalition had largely melted away, as a generation of liberalizing electoral change following the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had replaced most conservative (white) Southern Democrats with (white) Republicans and liberal-to-moderate (white and black) Democrats. Today, there is no significant ideological cleavage within either party, thus eliminating the basis for a cross-party bloc like the conservative coalition.

While the general contours of the conservative coalition story are clearly true – roll-call voting data show the frequent aligning of Southern Democrats and Republicans against Northern Democrats in the decades surrounding the mid-Twentieth Century (Stewart 2001, p. 120) – a fully fleshed-out picture of what the conservative coalition was and how it operated is lacking. Was the conservative coalition merely a floor voting coalition? That is, did Southern Democrats and Republicans simply come together at the voting stage based on a basic similarity of preferences? Or was the conservative coalition something more? Was it, for example, a group that proactively took advantage of institutional mechanisms of agenda control – like the Rules Committee and committee chairmanships – to prevent policies from receiving floor consideration? Stated differently, the literature is quite consistent in describing the conservative coalition as an obstructionist entity – but the *nature* of the obstruction has rarely been examined in a systematic way.

In this paper, we perform such a systematic examination. Specifically, we investigate whether evidence suggests that the conservative coalition wielded *negative agenda control*, that is, whether conservative Southern Democrats and Republicans used positions of power in the House to block bills from floor consideration that would have harmed (or “rolled”) a majority of their members. In envisioning the conservative coalition as an institutional (pre-floor) negative agenda setter, we incorporate the basic logic of Cox and McCubbins (2005) but consider the possibility that the majority party (the House Democrats, during this time period) was not the *only* group that could block bills from floor consideration.

In addition, our focus on committees as the key positions of power in a conservative coalition story jibes well with traditional views of House politics in the mid-Twentieth Century. Specifically, the “Textbook Congress” perspective, detailed most explicitly by Shepsle (1989), holds that the House was dominated by standing committees after the overthrow of Speaker Joe Cannon in 1910, as centralized majority-party control gave way to centralized committee government. Committee assignments were dictated by a strong seniority norm, and the path to chairmanships (the key nodes of power) was based on panel longevity. From the late-1930s through the mid-1980s, Southern Democrats were often the chamber’s elder statesmen, and thus they chaired many of the most important policy committees, as well as the Rules Committee.

A key moment that will help guide our analysis is the “packing” of the Rules Committee in 1961. Specifically, at the beginning of the 87th Congress (1961-62), the liberal majority in the Democratic Party was finally able to overpower its southern wing by voting to expand the size of Rules by three members; once enlarged with two more “reliable” Democratic members, the Rules Committee tilted in a liberal direction. This institutional alteration provides an important break in various data series and will allow us to derive separate hypotheses regarding the basis of

the conservative coalition, i.e., whether it was just a floor voting coalition or whether it operated as a negative agenda control institution.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the follow section, we discuss the debate in the literature regarding the precise nature of the conservative coalition and describe the power of committee chairmen in the conservative coalition era (and the role of the Rules committee in particular). We then move from the historical to the theoretical, deriving hypotheses about the effect of the packing of the Rules Committee packing using a modified version of the “cartel agenda model” (Cox and McCubbins 2005) for guidance. The remaining sections of the paper describe our research design, data, and empirical results. To summarize, we show that (1) the conservative coalition roll rate increased significantly after packing, (2) especially for bills reported from committees chaired by non-southerners. This latter result suggests that southern standing committee chairs continued to offer some protection from conservative coalition rolls after packing.

The Conservative Coalition: What Was It?

In the congressional literature, the conservative coalition is most commonly characterized as an empirical phenomenon. A “conservative coalition vote” is when a majority of Southern Democrats joins with a majority of Republicans in opposition to a majority of Northern (non-Southern) Democrats (Key 1949; Katznelson, Geiger, and Kryder 1993). As such, the conservative coalition is assumed (either implicitly or explicitly) to have been a floor voting coalition (or “bloc”) that formed along ideological lines, as Southern Democrats and Republicans voted together based on shared conservative preferences to defeat liberal policies. And, in this vein, a number of studies have emerged to examine what factors contributed to variation in conservative coalition activity (support) across time (see, e.g., Shelley 1983a, 1983b; Nye 1993).

A less frequent characterization of the conservative coalition suggests a level of organization that goes far beyond the reactive floor voting coalition story. Manley (1973) is the strongest proponent of this perspective. While acknowledging the floor-based conventional wisdom, he argues that a good deal of informal institutional coordination was also taking place between Southern Democratic leaders and Republican leaders at the *pre-floor stage*:

Simple policy agreement may be the single most important element holding the Conservative Coalition together, but the claim that the Coalition is no more than an accidental meeting of minds is excessive. There is substantial evidence of joint planning on the part of Coalition leaders, and Coalition observers have detected a number of cases of overt bipartisan cooperation among conservatives. In the face of this evidence, the fact that no regular formal caucuses of conservatives are held, and the fact that Republicans sometimes vote with northern Democrats against the southern Democrats, are insufficient to support the claim that the Coalition is purely accidental. *The Coalition is, in fact, many times a consciously designed force in the legislative process, and this is true for both the committee stage and the floor stage of that process* (Manley 1973, p. 231, emphasis added).

Thus, for Manley, the conservative coalition was not just a group of like-minded individuals from different partisan backgrounds who voted together on the floor to block liberal initiatives; rather, the conservative coalition operated at multiple levels, and using institutional positions of power to block *agenda access* was as (or perhaps more) critical to achieving policy success.

As evidence for his perspective, Manley cites interviews conducted with Reps. Howard W. Smith (D-Va.) and Joseph Martin (R-Mass.), leaders of the conservative coalition in the House in the 1950s and 1960s. Both Smith, Chairman of the Rules Committee from the 84th (1955-56) through 89th (1965-66) Congresses, and Martin, the Republican Minority Leader in the 84th (1955-56) and 85th (1957-58) Congresses, affirmed that informal meetings between Southern Democratic and Republican leaders were routine during this time, and that a coalition did in fact exist and explicit cooperation occurred. More direct evidence of organizational

behavior would be hard to uncover, according to Manley, because the conservative coalition operated “in subtle, hard-to-observe ways” (1973, p. 230).

While Manley’s characterization of the conservative coalition as a “coalition” is the most explicit in the literature, others have noted the negative alliance between Southern Democrats and Republicans on Rules. For example, Jones (1968, p. 635) asserts that “as chairman [of Rules], Smith was free to exercise his considerable powers to stifle legislation which he and his southern Democratic and Republican colleagues opposed.” He goes on to speak of this coalitional activity in explicit negative agenda control language: “The Committee on Rules was a roadblock to the majority. It was not allowing the House to vote on measures which a majority in the House wished to vote on” (639). Still others have linked conservative coalition activity and negative agenda control to House committees more generally. For example, Rohde (1991) and Sinclair (2006) note that a major component of the Democratic Caucus rules changes in the 1970s was to make committee chairmanships elective positions; this reform was intended to make sitting chairmen, many of whom were southern and were acting as steadfast veto gates, more responsive to the overall (liberal) position of the caucus on a host of issues.

Brady and Bullock (1980) argue against the Manley perspective of informal organization and instead support the conventional view of the conservative coalition “as a voting alliance based on shared ideology among Southern Democrats and Republicans” (550). To make the case that the conservative coalition did not wield negative agenda control, Brady and Bullock calculate correlations between presumed conservative coalition strength on committees and conservative coalition floor activity on a per-Congress basis. Their presumption is that if the conservative coalition acted as a negative agenda setter, greater internal organization at the pre-

floor (committee) stage should lead to less activity at the floor stage. The correlations are generally weak, however, and not always in the expected direction.

Little research on the conservative coalition as a negative agenda setting coalition has appeared since the Brady/Bullock article. More recently, the possibility that the conservative coalition exercised *positive agenda control* in the House has been explored at some length; the issue is whether the Rules Committee sought to actively move policy in a conservative direction by opening the gates on legislation that would roll the Democratic majority. While a vigorous debate has ensued, no consensus has been reached (see Schickler 2001; Cox and McCubbins 2005; Schickler and Pearson 2009).¹ That said, all sides in the positive agenda control debate seem to acknowledge that the Rules Committee *did* exercise negative agenda control, and that it explicitly served the preferences of the conservative coalition. Schickler (2001, p. 164), in particular, responds directly to the main criticism raised by Brady and Bullock, recalling arguments made by Manley earlier:

It has often been observed that conservatives lacked a formal organization during the supposed era of conservative coalition rule (Brady and Bullock 1980). Yet with the Rules Committee securely controlled by conservative Democrats and Republicans who consulted with one another regularly, there was little need for a formal, extrapartisan organization to coordinate coalition activities.

Cox and McCubbins (2005, p. 130) make a somewhat more general argument than Schickler, but the take-home point is the same:

In what sense was Rules an “agent of the opposition” during the years of peak conservative control? The most frequently encountered view is that Rules acted to *block* liberal legislation. As most liberal bills were proposed by members of the majority party and as many of these were supported by its leadership, blocking liberal bills entailed frustrating the plans of majority-party leadership. There are many accounts of how Rules did this, and we do not dispute them.

¹ This literature has focused on the period before the Rules Committee Packing in 1961.

Our goal is to examine these negative agenda control claims more systematically. (As such, we do not engage the debate in the positive agenda control literature.) We will investigate whether evidence suggests that the conservative coalition served as an institutional (pre-floor) blocking mechanism before the packing of the Rules committee in 1961. We will also explore whether committees more generally performed a negative agenda setting role – as the next line of defense – after the packing of the Rules Committee.

The Power of Committee Chairmen in the “Textbook Congress” Era

As we noted briefly above, the conservative coalition era overlapped with the “Textbook Congress” period of committee dominance in the U.S. House. Committee chairmen during this time were selected based on seniority almost without exception, and Democratic Party leaders (and the Democratic Caucus in general) had few tools for disciplining these chairs. Because virtually all legislation flowed through committees, chairmen possessed substantial power to prevent bills from receiving floor consideration.

Amid this era of strong committee chairs, the most powerful of all was the chairman of the Rules Committee. Almost all legislation during this time (as well as today), once reported from the standing committee of jurisdiction, required Rules Committee approval to gain floor consideration. Such approval first necessitated a hearing, which was scheduled solely at the discretion of the Rules chairman. Even with external pressure by the House leadership for a hearing, the Rules chairman could forestall action. As Robinson (1963, p. 86) notes: “There are always enough pending requests for hearings that the Chairman can conveniently schedule bills he favors and postpone those he opposes, thus delaying consideration of some matters.”

Rules first became a thorn in the side of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in 1937, after conservatives broke with FDR on a host of issues, and little had changed in the ensuing two

decades. Then, in the midterm elections of 1958, an opportunity to reshape the legislative terrain emerged – the Democrats took 48 Republican House seats, and almost all of these gains were outside of the South. The liberals were emboldened to challenge the conservatives’ dominance, but Chairman Smith was defiant and turned away the challenge with some deft parliamentary maneuvers. After President Kennedy’s narrow election in 1960 (and House Democrats giving back almost half their gains from two years earlier), Democratic House leaders, led by Speaker Sam Rayburn (D-Tex.), realized a change would need to be made in order to save the president’s legislative agenda (MacNeil 1963; Jones 1968).

Rayburn’s plan was to enlarge Rules from 12 to 15 members, with two of the additions being Democrats who were loyal to the Administration and the House Democratic Caucus. If accomplished, this would tip the committee as a whole away from the conservative bloc. Less than three weeks into the 87th Congress (1961-63), on January 31, 1961, a showdown vote was held, which the Democratic majority won, 217-212.² This temporary enlargement of Rules was made permanent two years later.

After the Rules Committee was enlarged, and better aligned with the Democratic Caucus, conservative hopes of pre-floor bill screening now hung on the various standing committees themselves. Southern committee chairs would now be responsible for negative agenda setting within their jurisdictions, as they were no longer protected by a conservative Rules Committee.

Implications of Conservative Coalition Negative Agenda Control

In order to investigate empirically how Southern committee chairs – either on Rules or on standing committees with control over particular issue jurisdictions – might have offered protection for the conservative coalition, we need to identify how outcomes vary across two

² This was a conservative coalition vote, as Northern Democrats voted 148-1, Southern Democrats voted 47-63, and Republicans voted 22-148.

alternative formulations: (1) one in which the conservative coalition acts as a floor voting coalition but nothing more, and (2) one where, in addition to acting as a floor coalition, Southern Democratic committee chairs acted as agents of the conservative coalition, screening out bills that went against coalition interests prior to reaching a floor vote.

The mechanics of this comparison operate identically to the Cartel Agenda Model (CAM) offered by Cox and McCubbins (2005), but for our purposes the key veto actor is a Southern Democratic committee chair. To see an illustration of the dynamics, consider Figure 1, which is a modified version of the basic CAM. As in that model, a bill (in one-dimensional policy space) proposes to move a status quo to F , the ideal point of the floor median.³ By assumption, members vote based on sincere policy preferences – choosing the closer of the status quo and the alternate proposal, which is always at F (and thus, by the basic median voter rule, the alternative always beats the SQ).

[Figure 1 about here]

M is the majority party median (under a Democratic majority, in this case) and creates a “blockout zone,” as all SQ s that are closer to M 's ideal point than M is to F 's ideal point are blocked from receiving a floor vote. That is, because all alternate proposals will be located at F and will pass, M has an incentive to block all SQ s that fall between $2M-F$ and F ; if M does not, each proposal will pass, thus moving policy away from his ideal point and the ideal points of at least half of the majority-party caucus.

To this foundation, we add a second veto actor: CC , a Southern Democratic committee chair. We assume that the chair has an ideal point that is (a) to the right of F and (b) at the median of the conservative coalition (i.e., he is the median member of all Southern Democrats

³ This is a function of the basic median voter result, combined with the assumption of an open amendment rule in the House.

and Republicans). Though the chairman's sincere preferences may not place him at the coalition median, we are assuming a scenario where he is "acting" like the median out of duty, as an agent of the conservative coalition, even if that is not his sincere ideal point. (This is similar to the basic CAM, where leaders and committee chairs operate as agents of the majority-party median.)

Next, consider the SQ shown in Figure 1, which lies just to the left of CC . If a bill is proposed at F , and allowed to come up for a floor vote, it will pass with the support of a majority of the Democratic Party (and almost certainly a majority of the Northern Democrats), and over the opposition of a majority of the conservative coalition. Thus, if CC is acting in the interest of the coalition, he will block floor consideration of this bill, along with any other bills addressing status quos between F and $2CC-F$, which we have labeled the "conservative coalition blackout zone."

Contrast the negative-agenda control scenario (just detailed) to the alternative scenario where the conservative coalition is nothing more than a floor voting coalition. If the Southern chair is not using his authority to screen harmful legislation before it reaches a floor vote, then some of the SQs in the conservative coalition blackout zone will be moved to the left over the objections of most of the conservative coalition members.

Consider what this implies about floor outcomes in the conservative coalition era, both before and after the packing of the Rules Committee in 1961. The conservative-coalition-agenda-control conceptualization implies that the Rules packing, which ostensibly removed an important source of negative agenda control and thus protection for the conservative coalition, should have exposed the coalition to many more bills that would pass against their will. Put another way, it should have led the conservative coalition to have been "rolled" significantly more often, where a "roll" is understood as a bill that passes over the nay votes of at least a

majority of Southern Democrats and a majority of Republicans.⁴ Accordingly, we seek to test the following hypothesis,

H₁: After the Rules Committee packing of 1961, the conservative coalition should have been rolled more often on the House floor after, all else equal.

Note that the null hypothesis here implies that the conservative coalition was a floor voting coalition and nothing more. In that case, where the Rules chair was not trying to protect the coalition from unfriendly floor votes even prior to 1961, the packing should have had no effect on floor rolls.

A second, somewhat more nuanced implication of the Rules Committee packing relates to the influence of other standing committee chairs. If the Rules chairman was in fact acting as an agent of the conservative coalition, it is likely that Southern Democratic chairs of other standing committees were acting with the same mandate. This broader institutional effect should have been apparent after packing, in the asymmetry between bills from southern and non-southern chaired committees. Once the Rules chair could no longer offer protection to the conservative coalition, bills from non-southern chaired committees had an open pathway to the floor. On the other hand, bills from Southern chaired committees could have still been killed by the chair acting in the interest of the conservative coalition. Accordingly, after packing, bills from southern and non-southern chaired committees should have been marked by different levels of agenda protection for the coalition, and produced different roll rates accordingly. Thus,

H₂: After the Rules Committee packing of 1961, the conservative coalition should have been rolled less often on the House floor on bills from committees chaired by southerners, as compared to bills from committees chaired by non-southerners, all else equal.

⁴ Rolls are the most often used measure of the presence and effectiveness of negative agenda control.

Data and Research Design

To evaluate these hypotheses, we use House roll-call data from the 84th (1955-56) through 97th (1981-82) Congresses, compiled in the Political Institutions and Public Choice (PIPC) House Roll-Call Database (Rohde 2010). Since the hypotheses focus on the Rules Committee packing, which occurred at the beginning of the 87th (1961-62) Congress, the appropriate research design requires that we have sufficient observations before and after that event.

We would have preferred a longer time-series prior to packing, but the Rohde roll-call data only begin in the 83rd Congress. And because the Republicans controlled the House in that Congress, it does not serve as a relevant comparison for the rest of the time-series; thus, we begin our analysis with the 84th Congress. We end with the 97th Congress because it was a natural break point in coding data on committee chairs.

Throughout the rest of our discussion, the base unit of analysis is a final-passage roll-call vote. In Figures 2 and 4, we include final-passage votes on both Senate and House originating resolutions (i.e., S bills and HR bills), but exclude simple resolutions, joint resolutions, and concurrent resolutions from both chambers. However, in the multivariate analysis and in Figure 3, where we compare roll rates on bills from southern and non-southern chaired committees, data limitations force us to look only at House originating resolutions (HR bills).⁵

Our basic research design is straightforwardly implied by the nature of our hypotheses: we structure our empirics to evaluate the “treatment” effect of the Rules Committee packing, and in the case of our second hypothesis, the interactive effect of that treatment with the “Southern Chair” condition. (We follow the standard ICPSR convention in coding “South” as the 11

⁵ To conduct this analysis, we merged the roll call data with the Congressional Bills Project data (Adler and Wilkerson, n.d.) on committee bill referrals, which only tracks the referral of House originated bills to House committees. Data on identity of committee chairs are drawn from Nelson (n.d.).

former-Confederate states plus Kentucky and Oklahoma.⁶) As a first cut at each hypothesis, we look at the raw “roll rates” – the proportion of all final-passage votes on which a “roll” occurs – for various coalitions, including the conservative coalition. We then turn to a multivariate analysis to confirm the impressions offered by the raw data.

Results

Based on the expectations set out in Hypothesis 1, we should see the conservative coalition roll rate increase significantly after the packing of the Rules Committee, which happens at the very beginning of the 87th Congress. If we simply compare the mean roll rate from the pre-packing Congresses (84th-86th) to the mean roll rate from the post-packing Congresses (87th-97th), we see some initial support for the hypothesis. Before packing, the mean conservative coalition roll rate is 1.2%; after packing, it is just over 6%.

Figure 2 offers a more fine-grained look at the relevant data, plotting roll rates for five (overlapping) groups – All Democrats, Southern Democrats, Northern Democrats, Republicans, and the Conservative Coalition – for each Congress from the 84th to the 97th. As expected, for most of the period the minority party Republicans are rolled at considerably higher rates than the Democrats. Per the expectations of the Cartel Agenda Model, and consistent with Cox and McCubbins’ (2005) findings, the Democratic (majority) roll rate is at or near zero for almost the entire period. The Northern Democratic roll rate is only slightly higher, and tracks very closely with the overall Democratic rate. Southern Democrats, on the other hand, are rolled just over 5% of the time at their *lowest* point and hover around 10% for much of the time period, with the exception of roll rates above 15% in the 85th and 86th Congresses.

⁶ We also employed an alternative coding of South, used in Katznelson and Mulroy (2012), that added four states (Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and West Virginia) to the 13 from the ICSPR coding. None of our main empirical results were affected.

[Figure 2 about here]

The conservative coalition's roll rate does seem to respond to the Rules packing, though the full magnitude of response is a bit delayed. After a 0% roll rate during the first two Congresses, there is an increase to 2.9% in 86th Congress, just prior to packing. Immediately after packing, in the 87th Congress, the conservative coalition is rolled just a little more often at 3.2%, but that nearly doubles to 5.8% in the 88th Congress, and increases again by about the same amount to 8.6% in the 89th Congress. The roll rate then falls and hovers around 3% for the next four congresses, before jumping to nearly 12% in the 94th Congress, about 7% in the 95th and 96th Congresses, and then falling back to about 3% in the 97th Congress. In sum, while there is some interesting variance in the conservative coalition roll rate after packing, the roll rate in all but one post-packing Congress is higher than the roll rate in every pre-packing Congress (the exception is the 90th Congress, which is just a half percent lower than the 86th Congress).

Next, we look at the differential effect depending on who chaired the committee that reported each bill. Per Hypothesis 2, we should see divergent patterns of conservative coalition roll rates after packing, depending on whether the bill was considered by a committee with a Southern or a non-Southern chair. Recall the logic of this expectation: after packing, the conservative coalition should still be "protected" on the floor from unfavorable bills that can be bottled up in committee by a Southern chair; however, with the Southern blockade on the Rules Committee out of the way, bills from committees chaired by non-Southerners now have an open path to the floor, even if they promise to roll the conservative coalition when they get there. Thus, Hypothesis 2 suggests that the conservative coalition roll rate after packing should have

increased more for bills from non-Southern chaired committees for bills from Southern chaired committees.

Figure 3 provides a first look at the relevant data, plotting conservative coalition roll rates on House originated (H.R.) bills from Southern and non-Southern chaired committees from the 84th to the 97th Congresses. Through most of the period, Southern chaired committees tend to produce lower or very similar roll rates. But the most striking divergence – along the lines suggested by Hypothesis 2 – occurs in the three Congresses immediately after packing. In the 87th, 88th, and 89th Congresses, the southern chair roll rate is 0%, 2.9%, and 5.6%, respectively, compared to non-southern chair roll rates of 8.8%, 10.5%, and 14.3% in the same congresses. The differences in the rest of the time-series are not as striking (though southern chairs produce 5 to 10% lower conservative-coalition roll rates from the 94th through the 96th congresses). And, in some congresses the southern chair roll rate is actually slightly higher (e.g., the 90th through 92nd Congresses). But the comparison of the three pre- and post-packing congresses offers compelling initial support for Hypothesis 2.

[Figure 3 about here]

We evaluate our hypotheses more systematically in the logit analyses presented in Table 1. The dependent variable in each analysis, *Conservative Coalition Roll*, is coded 1 if a majority of Republicans and a majority of Southern Democrats voted against a bill on final passage but it passed nonetheless, and 0 otherwise. The unit of observation is therefore a final passage vote-Congress. The key independent variables are *Post Packing*, which is coded 1 if the vote occurred after the Rules Committee was packed (87th-93rd Congresses), and 0 for Congresses prior to packing (84th-86th Congresses); *Southern Chair*, a dummy variable coded 1 when the vote occurs on a bill reported from a committee chaired by a Southern Democrat, and 0

otherwise;⁷ and *Post Packing x Southern Chair*, an interaction of the two variables. In Model 3, we add two bill level controls: *DWI*, which is the bill sponsor's first dimension DW-NOMINATE score, and *Committee Chair*, which is coded 1 if the bill's sponsor was the chair of the committee of origin, and 0 otherwise. In Model 4, we add three Congress level controls: *Majority Size*, which is the number of seats held by the majority party during the Congress in which the roll call was held, *Total FPVs*, which is the total number of final-passage votes on House or Senate originating resolutions (i.e., H.R. or S bills) held in that Congress, and *Post Reform*, a variable coded 1 for all congresses from the 93rd on. We estimate each model with robust standard errors, clustered by Congress.⁸

[Table 1 about here]

In model 1, the *post packing* variable captures the effect described in Hypothesis 1: the change in the conservative coalition roll rate from pre- to post- packing (in each subsequent model, it captures this effect for non-southern chaired bills only). As predicted, the coefficient is positive and significant at the 95% level. To interpret this result substantively, we use Clarify to estimate the predicted probability of a conservative coalition roll before and after packing, respectively; we present these predicted probabilities in the top row of Table 2. Here, we see that packing nearly quadrupled the predicted roll rate: 1.5% in the pre-packing period to 5.7% after packing.

Models 2 adds *southern chair* and our *post packing*southern chair* interaction term, allowing us to evaluate Hypothesis 2. To compare the southern and non-southern chair post-packing roll rate, as implied by Hypothesis 2, we do a linear combination test of *southern chair*

⁷ We coded bills that were multiply referred as coming from a southern chaired committee only if all of the committees they were referred to were chaired by southerners. However, when we excluded these bills from the analysis, the results are substantively identical with respect to our hypotheses.

⁸ We were initially inclined to cluster at both the committee and Congress levels, but Cameron, Gelbach, and Miller (2012) suggest that clustering at the highest level of aggregation is sufficient.

plus *post packing*southern chair*. The result of this test, reported in the very bottom row of Table 1, shows a significant, negative effect at the 99% level. Thus, for bills reported from committees chaired by southerner, as predicted in Hypothesis 2, roll rates are significantly lower than non-southerners after packing. This result holds across Models 3 and 4 as we add in bill level (Model 3) and Congress level (Model 4) control variables (though it weakens slightly in Model 4). We had no particular directional expectation about any of our control variables. In Model 4, we see lower roll rates on bills sponsored by the committee chair, and larger majorities seem to have produced more conservative coalition rolls.

[Table 2 about here]

To investigate the magnitude of this result, we derive predicted probabilities (from Model 2) for bills from southern and non-southern chairs in both the pre- and post-packing periods. In the pre-packing period, the predicted probability for southern chairs is actually slightly higher (1.7%) than for non-southern chairs (0%). The increase from pre- to post-packing, however, is much more dramatic for non-southern chairs. After packing, non-southern chairs produce rolls at an estimated 7.1%, compared to 4.6% for southern chairs. So for bills from non-southern chaired committees, the post-packing increase of over 7% was more than twice as large as the 2.9% increase for bill from southern chaired committees.

Conclusion

According to the literature on congressional decision making, the conservative coalition was the phantom menace of the mid-20th century House: always lurking and occasionally imposing its will on chamber decisions, but never clearly surfacing as a coherently institutionalized group. In this paper, we have attempted to take steps in unmasking the specific nature of its influence. In particular, we have asked whether the conservative coalition was

simply an accidental floor coalition, occasionally brought together because Southern Democrats and Republicans shared similar preferences on certain issues, or something more closely approaching a procedural coalition, which utilized legislative positions of power to pre-screen harmful bills from reaching floor consideration.

Focusing specifically on the period surrounding the packing of the Rules committee – widely believed to be the event that broke the conservative coalition’s most potent (alleged) weapon for exercising negative agenda control – we find systematic evidence of pre-floor screening by the conservative coalition. The conservative coalition roll rate increased significantly after packing, and this effect was especially pronounced for bills reported from committees chaired by non-southern members. Apparently, though not a perfect substitute for the protection of the Rules committee chair, southern standing committee chairs managed to offer some protection for the conservative coalition after packing.

This paper has looked at an admittedly small portion of the conservative coalition period, and has focused largely on conservative coalition rolls. Though we think these are the most obvious places to look for evidence of conservative coalition negative agenda control, and the most likely places to find it, there is more to be done. A longer time series, stretching backwards to the beginning of the conservative coalition period, and other measures such as coalition size, whip counts, and individual roll rates will help further uncover the precise nature of the conservative coalition's influence. We leave these extensions for future work.

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Figure 1. Blockout Zones in the Conservative Coalition Era

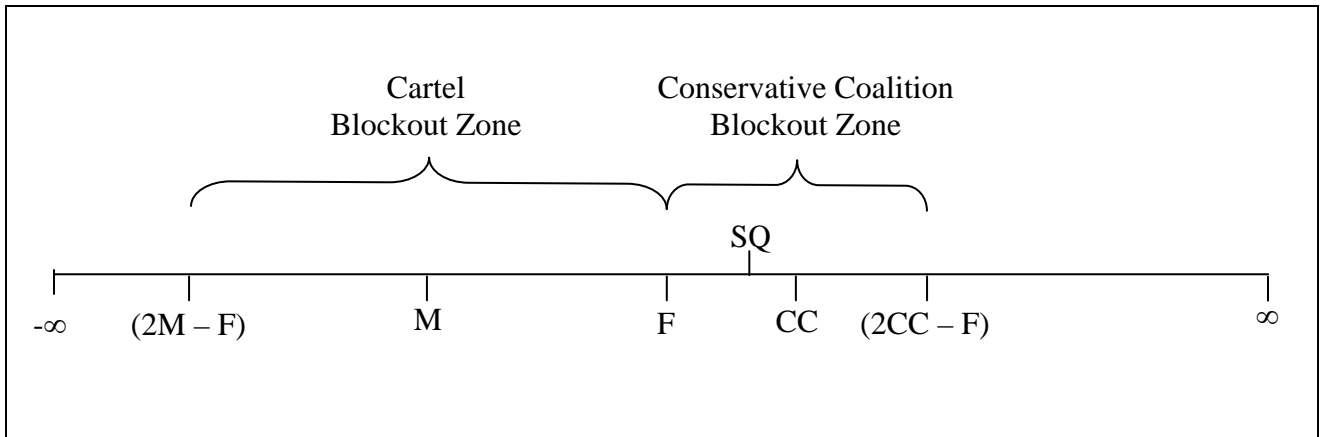


Figure 2: Roll rates from the 84th - 97 Congresses

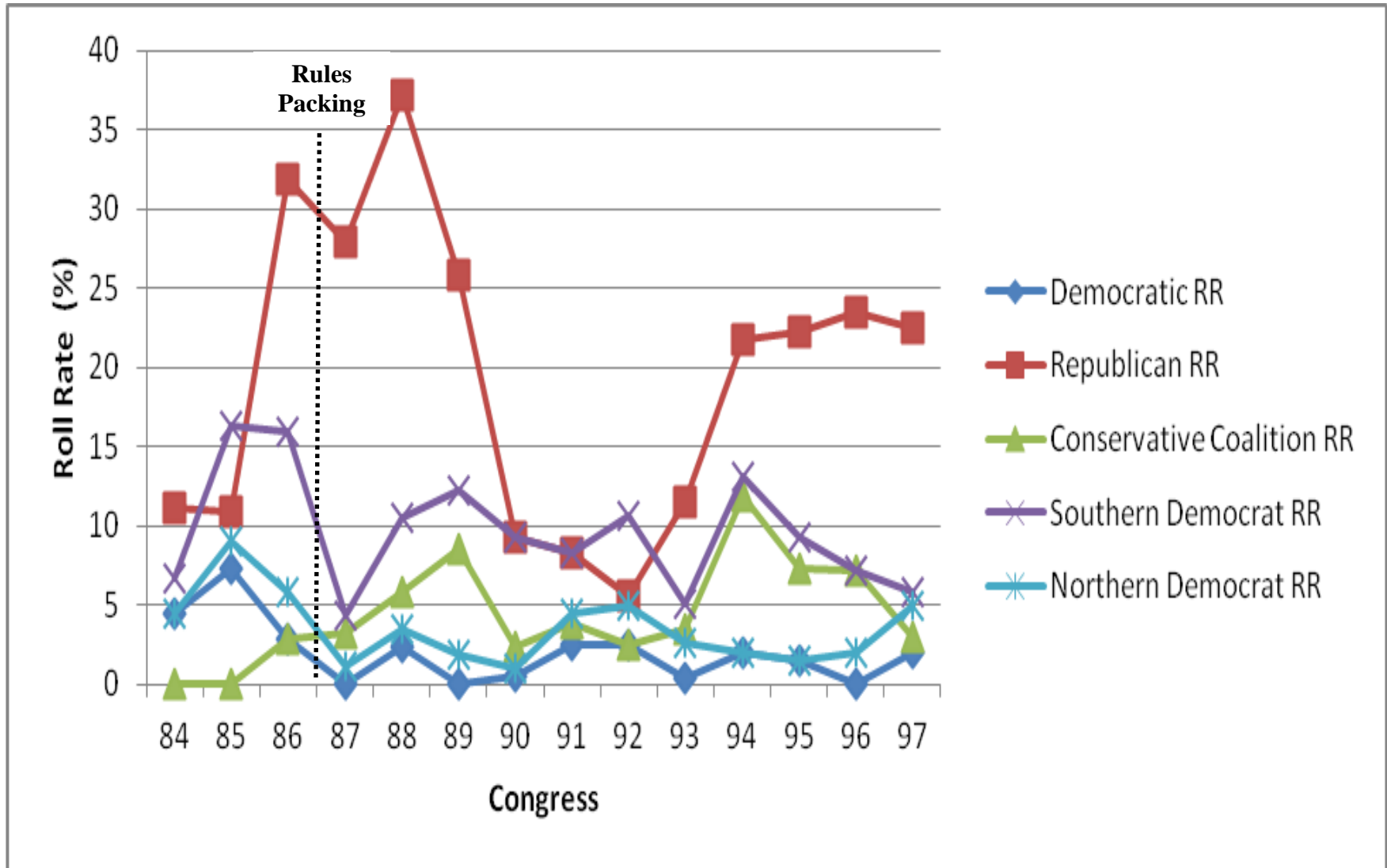


Figure 3: Roll rates on bills from Southern and Non-Southern chaired committees

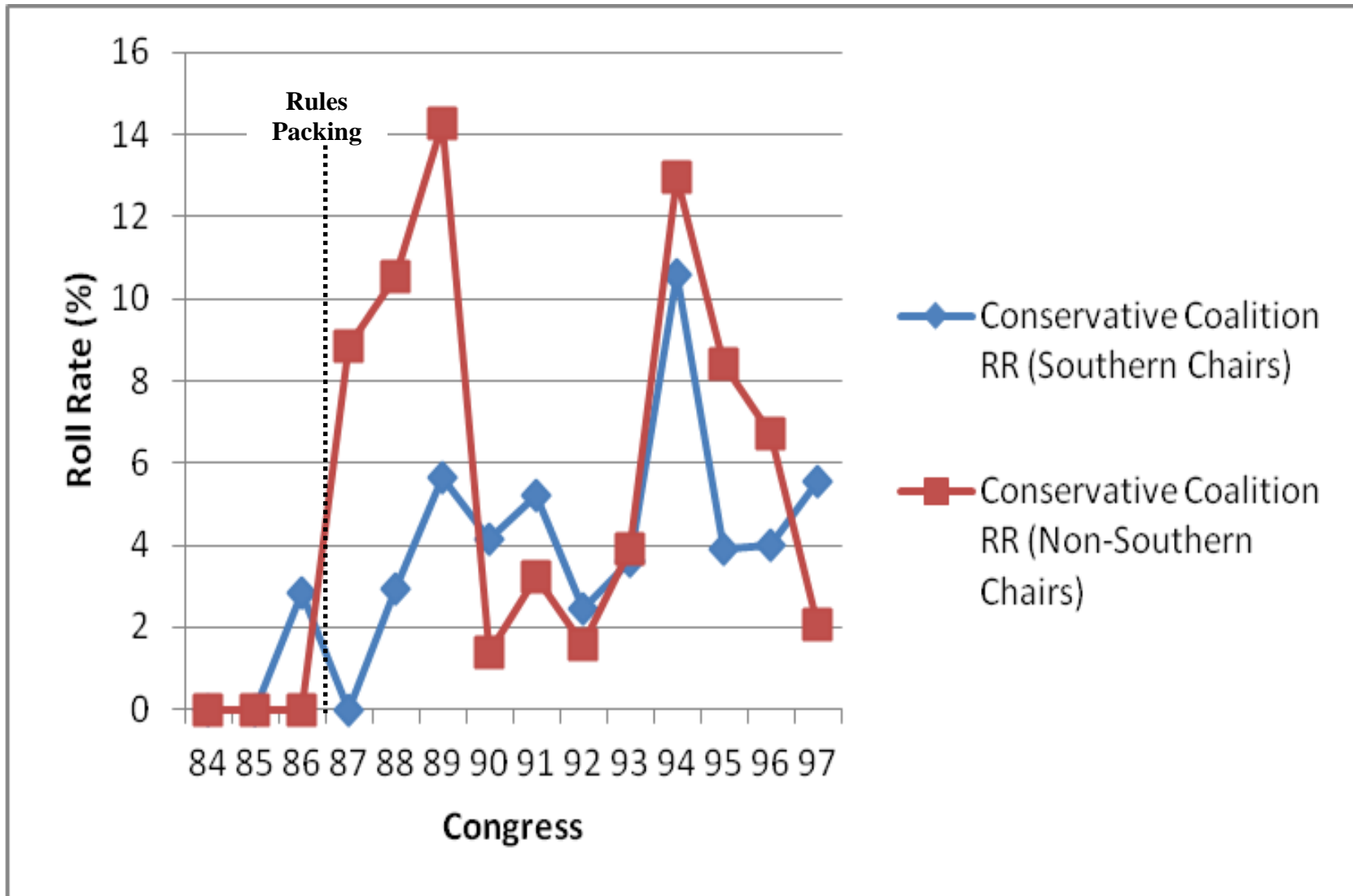


Table 1: Logit Estimation of the Rules Packing and Southern Chair Effects on Conservative Coalition Rolls, 84th - 93rd

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Post Packing (H1)</i>	1.6120** (0.7917)	13.9887*** (0.6486)	14.8884*** (0.6733)	12.9555*** (0.7992)
<i>Southern Chair</i>		12.2109*** (1.0221)	13.1540*** (1.0267)	11.7316*** (.9994)
<i>Post Packing x Southern Chair</i>		-12.6899*** (1.0346)	-13.6151*** (1.0348)	-12.0205*** (1.0171)
<i>DW-NOM1</i>			-0.00008 (0.0001)	-0.0001 (0.0001)
<i>Committee Chair Sponsor</i>			-0.3372 (0.2546)	-0.3834* (0.2322)
<i>Majority Size</i>				.0219*** (0.0022)
<i>Total FPVs</i>				0.0027 (0.0019)
<i>Post Reform</i>				-0.0835 (0.1597)
Constant	-4.4248*** (0.7623)	-16.5673*** (0.6172)	-17.3583*** (0.6355)	-21.8493*** (1.0180)
<i>N</i>	1970	1635	1614	1614
<i>Wald-χ^2</i>	4.15**	482.44***	509.71***	740.75***
<i>Pseudo R²</i>	0.011	0.022	0.027	0.055
<i>Southern Chair + Post Packing x Southern Chair (H2)</i>	--	-0.4790*** (0.1601)	-0.4610*** (0.1666)	-0.3489* (0.1946)

Note: Logit estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses; errors are clustered by Congress in all models.

Dependent Variable: Coded 1 if conservative coalition (majority of Southern Democrats + majority of Republicans) is rolled on a final-passage vote of a House originating bill (H.R.).

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)

Table 2: Predicted Probabilities of Conservative Coalition Rolls

	Pre Packing	Post Packing
--	1.5%	5.7%
Southern Chair	1.7%	4.6%
Non- Southern Chair	0%	7.1%

Note: Probabilities drawn from Models (1) and (2) in Table 1 using Clarify in STATA.