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# Unpacking Agenda Control in Congress: Individual Roll Rates and the Republican Revolution

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## Abstract

The twelve years following the Republican revolution provide ideal ground to test existing theories of congressional behavior and organization. The authors examine the incidence of individual roll rates in the U.S. House to “unpack” the degree to which the 1994 election produced a change in agenda control and examine how it affected roll rates. Then, to understand differences in agenda control, we compare majority and minority party roll rates before and after the election. The results confirm majority party influence over the House agenda and show that the Republican leadership exhibited remarkably similar behavior to the Democrats prior to 1995.

## Keywords

Congress, roll rates, agenda control, partisan influence

After picking up fifty-two House seats in the 1994 election, the Republican Party achieved majority control and, for the first time in forty years, was in a strong position to advance its policy objectives.<sup>1</sup> This so-called Republican revolution helps illustrate the importance of agenda control in Congress, and the transfer of power it brought about provides an opportunity to address two specific questions. First, party-based explanations of legislative organization hold that members of the majority party delegate to party leaders based on the expectation that it will yield policy benefits (Rohde 1991; Cox and McCubbins 1993). Thus, did the new Republican majority reap the rewards of the change in majority status, by way of a change in agenda control?

Second, much has been made of the influence wielded by the Republicans during their time in control of the House. Some observers have suggested that after gaining the majority, the Republicans were even more aggressive in pushing procedural advantages than their Democratic predecessors (Fenno 1997; Mann and Ornstein 2006). This leads us to systematically investigate the following question: Did the Republicans usher in a new period of agenda control greater than that seen among Democrats when they held the majority in the House prior to 1995?

We build here on two pieces of previous research—Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith (2006) and Cox and McCubbins (n.d.)—which are pioneering works on individual-level voting patterns. Moreover, Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith emphasize the 1994 change in

majority control as an important part of their analysis. We differ from Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith’s work in two important ways. First, we utilize a different dependent variable—we use “rolls” instead of “wins”—both in deriving our theoretical predictions and testing competing theories. We see this as an important distinction, especially if one is interested specifically in the effects of *negative* agenda power, which we discuss in more detail in the third section. Second, we expand our analysis beyond final passage votes to also consider patterns of voting on special rules and conference reports. Increasingly, there has been a call to look beyond final passage votes in assessing legislative behavior (Roberts and Smith 2003; Krehbiel and Woon, n.d.); we aim to take steps to answer that call.

We focus on how individual members fare in the U.S. House in an attempt to “unpack” the nature of agenda control. One way to think of partisan agenda control is as a dichotomous distribution of benefits (the majority party wins and the minority party loses). Indeed, this is how

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partisan theories are often perceived: predicting nonmedian outcomes in the majority party's direction, monopolizing all of the benefits of the policy process for the majority, and distributing benefits uniformly across the party. We view this as a misinterpretation of partisan theories. Accordingly, we derive and test the individual-level implications of partisan theories. By doing this, we can uncover the intraparty distribution of negative agenda control winners and losers, especially within the majority party; indeed, we find that this pattern is anything but uniform.

### Who Controls the Agenda in Congress?

When asked, "Do parties affect outcomes in Congress?" one's first instinct is to look for arm twisting and promised favors by party leaders as a means of changing members' voting decisions. And, indeed, there is burgeoning debate over party influence on members' roll call vote choices (Snyder and Groseclose 2000, 2001; Cox and Poole 2002; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2001; Groseclose and Snyder 2003; Krehbiel 2003a, 2003b; Jenkins, Crespín, and Carson 2005). Yet, increasingly, scholars have responded to this question by looking for evidence of agenda manipulation by the majority party. If the majority party can control *what gets voted on*, through their control of the Rules Committee and other control committees combined with the Speaker's scheduling power, then they can affect outcomes even where they cannot effectively twist arms and promise favors (Finocchiaro and Rohde 2008). Thus, the question that has taken center stage in the debate over party effects is, "Who controls the agenda in Congress?"

Krehbiel (1991) offers a parsimonious view of congressional agenda control. On the basis of a one-dimensional spatial model of the policy process, Krehbiel suggests that much of the variance in congressional outcomes can be explained by accounting for institutional rules, especially the majority voting requirement, that define the legislative process in the House. That is, we should think of the floor median as the agenda setter, given that any majority coalition can discharge a bill from committee, change policy, change the rules, or elect the Speaker. According to this argument, there is little or no explanatory power to be gained by adding the assumption of party effects, and thus for simplicity's sake, parties can be left out of the theory.

Partisan theories of legislative organization (Rohde 1991; Aldrich and Rohde 1997-98, 2000; Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005), in contrast, argue that the majority party has control of the legislative agenda. Furthermore, partisan perspectives assume that using agenda

power—in both positive and negative ways—benefits majority party members. Specifically, legislators in the majority act as if their own electoral success is largely contingent upon the record of the party. They expect to reap individual rewards—in terms of pork projects, campaign contributions, and procedural advantage—by being a member of the majority (Rohde 1991). Therefore, partisan theories assume that members have a significant stake in enacting policies associated with the party's agenda. Moreover, party leaders recognize the advantages of keeping certain items *off* the legislative agenda, especially those that might increase the possibility of defeat at the floor stage of the legislative process (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005).

As suggested earlier, one way of thinking about agenda control in Congress, in light of these competing views, is in terms of who succeeds and who fails in terms of roll call outcomes. One prominent operationalization of this concept is the roll rate. A party (or group of members) is rolled when it votes against a measure that nevertheless passes. While rolls were first analyzed in the context of congressional committee politics (Fenno 1966), the idea has been applied to the study of partisan influence in Congress (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Roberts 2005). In focusing specifically on final passage votes in the House, Cox and McCubbins (2002, 2005) have found that at the aggregate level, the majority party is almost never rolled.

### The Republican Revolution as a Test of Divergent Predictions

Following Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith (2006), we see the 1994 election as providing a clear-cut test of the divergent predictions of competing theories of legislative behavior. As one party gains control of the agenda while the other loses it, we should see a predictable change in member success and failure rates, controlling for changing member preferences. Examining the incidence of partisan rolls for Democrats and Republicans before and after the 1994 elections offers us a clean way of assessing who wins and loses in terms of agenda control. It also lets us evaluate the extent to which the majority parties exhibited similar behavior during adjacent political eras.

Additionally, an analysis of roll rates before and after the 1994 election offers us a chance to examine a related issue. Prompted in part by the observation that Republican control coincided with increased partisan polarization (Bond and Fleisher 2000; Jacobson 2000; Roberts and Smith 2003; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003; Theriault 2008), many scholars have suggested that the Republican Party is largely responsible for this increased partisanship (Aldrich and Rohde 2000, 2005; Dodd and Oppenheimer 2005; Oleszek 2004; Sinclair 2000). For

instance, Speaker Gingrich set the stage for increased partisanship early during the 104th Congress by asserting his authority to select certain standing committee chairs on the basis of party loyalty, thus violating the seniority norm in the House (Aldrich and Rohde 1997-98; Yoshinaka 2005). Additionally, Dennis Hastert was reputed to wield an enormous amount of authority in terms of keeping legislation unpopular within the Republican Conference off the congressional agenda.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this anecdotal evidence suggests that Republicans have more aggressively used the powers and privileges of the majority than did their predecessors to control the legislative agenda.

It is quite possible, however, that assessments of increased partisanship under Republican control were mistaken. Those who see an increase in partisanship under the Republican majority may understate the degree of partisan agenda control exercised by the Democrats in the 1980s and into the 1990s. After all, by the mid- to late 1980s, the Democrats had a largely homogenous party, presumably exercising the full range of majority party powers—including agenda control (Rohde 1991). It remains to be seen, then, whether the 1994 elections brought about an unprecedented change in the *majority* party's use of agenda control tactics.

### Theoretical Motivations for Agenda Control

Recent studies of agenda control in Congress tend to look at roll rates in the aggregate. That is, a roll represents the passage of a bill over the dissent of a majority of some coalition of legislators, usually a party. This provides for the calculation of a roll rate, usually for the period of an entire Congress. An alternate means of calculating roll rates is at the individual level. While less common, the use of individual roll rates to test partisan theories of agenda control has proven fruitful to date (Cox and McCubbins 2002, n.d.; Den Hartog 2005a, 2005b). Examining individual-level data has a certain appeal in the context of partisan theories. One of the central features of partisan theories in Congress is the argument that members delegate authority to the party leadership because it is in their individual self-interest to do so (Sinclair 1983; Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 1993). Thus, by implication, representatives should reap rewards at the individual level when their party is in the majority.<sup>3</sup>

The real leverage of employing individual roll rates, however, goes beyond this aggregate prediction. That is, using individual roll rates allows us to more thoroughly unpack the nature of the benefits conferred by partisan agenda control in the House. When we look at aggregate roll rates, we are forced to generalize the success or failure

of partisan agenda control across all members of the party. But do we think that all members benefit (suffer) equally at the hands of the central gatekeepers? We suspect that the answer is no, but we need to examine roll rates at the individual level to discern the nuances of agenda control across individuals within each party.

Our argument follows Lawrence, Maltzman, and Smith (2006), LMS hereafter, in using individual-level roll call analysis to assess the parties versus preferences debate. LMS make an important contribution by shifting the unit of analysis from the coalition (i.e., majority and minority *party* roll rates) to the individual member, a shift that is appropriate given the emphasis on individualism in congressional studies. LMS investigate individual members' *win rates* as a means of examining party effects. Examining votes on final passage in the House, LMS find that majority party agenda control leads to higher win rates for individual members of the majority party. Despite the conceptual similarity in the key dependent variables and parallels in the general theoretical arguments between LMS and us, there are two important differences.

First, win rates and roll rates are not simply the inverse of one another. The inverse of a member's win rate is his or her loss rate, which simply measures how often that member votes opposite the winning side on roll calls. A loss rate, then, makes no distinction among losses as to whether the proposals upon which members are voting pass or fail. In not making that distinction (whether the focus is on the win or the loss rate), there is a risk of conflating two types of agenda control potentially exercised by parties in the legislature: *positive* and *negative* agenda control.

A roll is certainly a type of loss, but by distinguishing *disappointments* (losses where a member votes against the floor majority and the measure fails) and *rolls* (losses where a member votes opposite the floor majority and the measure passes), we see that different types of losses (wins) represent failures (successes) of different types of agenda control.<sup>4</sup> On a particular vote, a disappointment suffered by a member suggests both a success in getting a preferred proposal onto the agenda and, perhaps more importantly, a failure in locating that proposal such that it is majority preferred to the status quo. A roll, on the other hand, usually represents something being allowed onto the agenda that those rolled would have preferred to keep off the agenda.<sup>5</sup> If we view negative agenda control as being the primary means by which the majority party gains its policy advantage (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 234-41; 2005), then it is clear that a focus on win or loss rates can confuse our attempt to reveal specific tools used by the majority party.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, we argue (contra LMS) that there is important *preference-based*

variation within the majority party coalition such that particular members cannot always be protected from being rolled. In other words, membership in the majority party is not a sufficient condition for being “protected” by majority party negative agenda control.

This focus on negative agenda control represents a weak partisan model. In other words, the negative agenda control story implies gatekeeping—and not arm twisting—as the means of pursuing policy outcomes. Majority party advantage (or even bias) is achieved not through the placement of proposals away from the floor median but rather through the selective targeting of status quos. This goes to the heart of the distinction between positive and negative agenda control, and to why we must distinguish among the various types of roll call wins and losses.

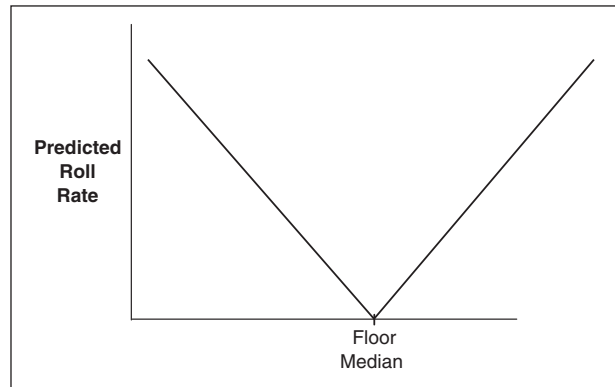
### *A Pure Preference-driven Model of Individual Roll Rates*

The basis for contrasting partisan- and pure preference-based agenda control in the context of the 1994 election can be shown using a simple one-dimensional model of the policy space. Following Krehbiel (1991), let us consider the pure preference-based theory of agenda control. Figure 1 represents the policy space along the  $x$ -axis, where individual members would be positioned from most liberal (left) to most conservative (right), and individuals' predicted roll rates along the  $y$ -axis. Assuming legislation is considered under an open rule, a pure preference-based model makes a straightforward prediction about individual roll rates over the policy space:

*Hypothesis 1 (Pure Preferences):* The further an individual is from the floor median, the more often he or she should be rolled, regardless of party affiliation.

This prediction is represented in the figure by the “v-shape” roll rate function, increasing on either side of the floor median's ideal point.<sup>6</sup>

To see how this prediction is derived, consider the conditions under which an individual in Figure 1 would be rolled. Assume that individuals (with single-peaked symmetrical preferences) seek to maximize their own utility, which is defined by the distance between their preferred policy and the actual policy. For an individual to be rolled, he or she must prefer the status quo to the proposed bill. This implies that his or her ideal point must be farther from the floor median's ideal point (which is the location of all policy proposals) than the status quo.<sup>7</sup> The most obvious status quos that fit this description are those between the individual's ideal point and the floor median.<sup>8</sup> For example, if a legislator were to the left of a



**Figure 1.** Expected relationship between ideological location and individual roll rates under the pure preferences model

status quo left of the floor median, then the proposed bill would pass with (at minimum) the support of a majority comprising the floor median and everyone to the right of the floor median. Such a representative, though, would unsuccessfully vote against the bill and would thus be rolled.

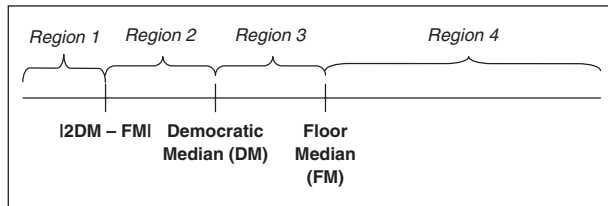
Finally, assume that status quos are uniformly distributed across the policy space.<sup>9</sup> As individuals get farther from the floor median, more status quos inhabit the space between their ideal points and that of the floor median. Accordingly, opportunities for these individuals to be rolled should increase. Thus, in this pure preference formulation, roll rates should increase the same on the right and left as the distance between legislators and the floor median increases.

### *Individual Roll Rates and Majority Party Agenda Setting*

Following Cox and McCubbins's (2002, 2005) “cartel model,” we include one additional assumption: a majority party leader, depicted by the majority party median in the model, can veto any proposal he or she wishes.<sup>10</sup> The party median, however, is assumed to veto bills on the same basis that he or she would vote against them. He or she makes no special consideration as a party leader and maximizes his or her utility like any other individual in the policy space. As in the pure preference model, a bill is proposed at the floor median's ideal point. The majority party median elects to veto the bill or let it come to a vote, thus exercising negative agenda control. If a vote occurs, everyone votes sincerely, as in the pure preference model.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, adding a veto for the majority median yields “protection” of sorts for any individual whose ideal point resides between that of the floor median and the





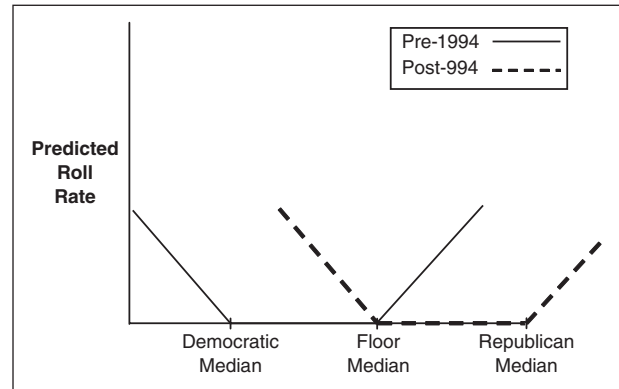
**Figure 2.** Possible locations of status quos under the cartel model with a Democratic majority

majority party median. To illustrate this, consider four status quos under a Democratic majority, regions 1 through 4 in Figure 2.<sup>12</sup> In region 1, status quos are so far to the left of the Democratic median that the individual's ideal point is closer to the floor median. Here, the Democratic median and any member to his or her right will prefer the new bill to the status quo. Thus, for each of these status quos, the bill will pass without rolling the individuals between the Democratic and floor medians. Note, however, that this is also true under the pure preference model.

Next, consider status quos on the other side of the floor median, in region 4. For these status quos, a new bill passes with support of the floor median and everyone to his or her left (including the Democratic median). Again, legislators between the floor and Democratic medians are not rolled, but this too is true under the baseline preference driven model. Now consider region 2, where status quos are to the left of the Democratic median, but (unlike region 1) the Democratic median is closer to the status quos than the floor median. In this case, the Democratic median will prefer the status quo to the new bill and thus veto the bill before it ever comes up for vote. Accordingly, no roll is possible for any individual in the policy space.

Consider what would happen if the Democratic median lacked the ability to veto the proposal. The Democratic median and any individual to his or her left who preferred the status quo to the bill would vote against the bill, it would pass, and they would be rolled. Thus, for at least some of the individuals between the Democratic and floor medians on all of the status quos in region 2, the veto by the Democratic median saves them from being rolled.

Finally, in region 3, status quos are between the Democratic and floor medians. Here, the Democratic median will prefer each of these status quos to the new bill, and thus will veto the bill before a vote occurs. Again, no roll is possible for any individual in the policy space. Consider what would happen in the pure preference model. For any given status quo in region 3, all individuals to the left (and some to the right) of the status quo would vote against the bill, the bill would pass, and those opposing members (including the Democratic median) would be rolled. Thus, for all of the members between the



**Figure 3.** Expected relationship between ideological location and individual roll rates under the cartel model

Democratic and floor medians, some status quo exists that could roll them in the pure preference model, but not under the partisan model.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, we predict that there is no status quo that can produce a roll of members between the floor median and the majority party median. This is not true for members outside that interval. In the case of a Democratic majority, an individual to the right of the floor median would be rolled by a status quo between the floor median and the individual on his or her right. Individuals to the left of the Democratic median would be rolled by a status quo inside the edge of region 1, just far enough from the Democratic median to make a new bill preferable.

Following this logic, Figure 3 represents individuals' predicted roll rates under the cartel model. The solid line represents the prediction under the pre-1994 Democratic majority, and the dashed line represents the prediction under the post-1994 Republican majority. Like the pure preference model prediction, the more extreme members get, the higher their predicted roll rates. However, under the cartel model, roll rates do not increase on either side of the floor median, but instead increase on either side of the interval anchored by the floor median and the majority party median. All members within that interval have a predicted roll rate of zero. Thus, the question becomes, Who are those "zero roll rate members" likely to be? They are disproportionately or entirely majority party members. Thus, we derive the following predictions regarding individual roll rates that occur before and after the 1994 election:

*Hypothesis 2a (Cartel Democrats):* Democratic individual roll rates should have increased following the 1994 election, all else equal.

*Hypothesis 2b (Cartel Republicans):* Republican individual roll rates should have decreased following the 1994 election, all else equal.

Note that for both periods, the partisan model predicts that roll rates increase as individuals move away from the interval bounded by the majority party median and the floor median regardless of whether the majority median is on the right or the left of the floor median (as shown in Figure 3). Thus, we can also investigate the following hypothesis for both periods:

*Hypothesis 3a (Partisan):* While individual roll rates should be flat with respect to ideological distance within the interval bounded by the majority and floor medians, roll rates should increase as individual legislators are further, in both directions, from this interval.

One implication of this final hypothesis is that not all majority party members are equally advantaged by the majority party's ability to keep legislation off the floor. Although legislators in the protected region will be disproportionately in the majority party, minority party members are not the only legislators predicted to have a nonzero roll rate. Rather, we expect majority party members who are on the extreme side of the majority median to be rolled in at least some instances. As such, it is the most loyal party members that are expected to be rolled most often.

The frequency with which extreme legislators are rolled depends upon the distribution of status quos that are addressed by the chamber. Consider a Democratic majority where the party median refused to consider any policy addressing a status quo to the left of the floor median, even if the floor median's ideal point would make the majority median better off. If the party were to adopt this policy, the protected zone would now encompass all the legislators to the left of the floor median. Similarly, the Democratic median could refuse to consider any status quos to the right of the floor median. This unusual strategy would have the consequence of extending the protected zone to cover all members to the right of the floor median, including the entire minority party. While we think it improbable that the majority median would adopt either of these strategies, it seems quite reasonable that the Democratic party leadership might focus primarily on rightward status quos and address only the most extreme left-hand status quos. To the extent that this holds, we should observe the following pattern of individual roll rates:

*Hypothesis 3b (Partisan):* Both before and after the 1994 election, individuals in the "protected interval" should have the lowest roll rates; individuals to the extreme side of the majority median should have the second-lowest roll rates; individuals to the minority party side of

the floor median should have the highest roll rates.

Note that this is not a prediction derived explicitly from the cartel model. Rather, we assume that the majority median derives some extra utility by protecting extreme members of the party (the collective good underpinning the cartel model, party reputation, is bolstered by not targeting status quos that would upset the extreme wing of the party).

## Data and Results

Recall that the pure preferences model suggests that individual roll rates increase as members get further from the floor median, while the cartel model holds that in addition to the extremity of preference, majority status plays a role in predicting a member's individual roll rate. We investigate predictions of the cartel model by expanding our focus to the interactive effect of majority status and preferences on individual roll rates. Next, we test a prediction derived from anecdotal evidence: House Republicans were more aggressive in using the tools possessed by the majority party. If true, we should find that party effects expected across different eras of partisan control increased following the 1994 Republican takeover. Substantively, then, majority roll rates are expected to drop after the switch, while minority roll rates are expected to increase.

The research design we use is roughly analogous to a two-group switching replications experiment (Trochim 2001, 213). That is, in the pre-1994 era, the Democrats are the "treatment group" (majority status being the treatment), while the Republicans are the control group. After 1994, this switches, and Republicans receive the majority status treatment, while the Democrats have the treatment taken away and play the role of control group.

To conduct these tests, we examine individual roll rates on three different vote types: special rule adoptions, final passage votes, and conference report adoptions. Each of these vote types is important for theories of agenda control in Congress; special rule adoptions determine what gets on the floor, while final passage and conference report votes reflect the effectiveness of agenda control at final stages of the legislative process. That is, the goal of agenda control in Congress is to determine which bills make it to final passage and eventually to conference.<sup>13</sup>

We employ individual roll rates as our dependent variable. For each vote type, this is measured as the proportion of votes on which a representative votes against a measure that passes.<sup>14</sup> Since the dependent variable sums legislators' binary choices, producing a variable ranging from 0 to 1, the appropriate estimation technique is extended beta binomial (Prentice 1986; King 1989; Palmquist

**Table 1.** The Effect of the 1994 Election on Republican and Democratic Individual Roll Rates

| Rollrate <sub>it</sub>                            | Model 1: Special rule adoption | Model 2: Final passage | Model 3: Conference report |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Dem   |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | -3.211                         | -1.608                 | -1.119                     |
| SE  | 0.035                          | 0.032                  | 0.042                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Post-1994 $\beta_2$ (-)                           |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | -3.955                         | -1.565                 | -1.131                     |
| SE  | 0.044                          | 0.032                  | 0.044                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Dem*Post-1994                                     |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | 7.147                          | 2.794                  | 1.559                      |
| SE  | 0.061                          | 0.051                  | 0.073                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Distance from floor median                        |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | 2.066                          | 2.803                  | 2.829                      |
| SE  | 0.063                          | 0.062                  | 0.089                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Constant  |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | -0.321                         | 1.682                  | -1.820                     |
| SE  | 0.034                          | 0.035                  | 0.050                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| $\gamma$  |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | 0.031                          | 0.038                  | 0.076                      |
| SE  | 0.001                          | 0.001                  | 0.003                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Post-1994 + Dem*Post-1994 $\beta_2 + \beta_3$ (+) |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | 3.192                          | 1.228                  | 0.428                      |
| SE  | 0.036                          | [0.034]                | [0.047]                    |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| N   | 3,517                          | 3,517                  | 3,517                      |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                             | 0.452                          | 0.202                  | 0.162                      |
| Log likelihood                                    | -96382.698                     | -156784.17             | -58993.874                 |

Dependent variable: Individual roll rate. Estimation technique: extended beta binomial.

1999).<sup>15</sup> The unit of analysis for each vote type is a legislator in a Congress, and the  $N$  is composed of an observation for each legislator in each Congress in the period under study.

### The 1994 Takeover: Majority Status and Individual Roll Rates

Our first set of models examines the effect of the 1994 midterm election on the roll rates of Democrats and Republicans, respectively:

$$\text{Rollrate}_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Dem}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Post-1994}_t + \beta_3 \text{Dem}_{it} * \text{Post-1994}_t + \beta_4 \text{Distance}_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Accordingly, we focus on the coefficients of two variables. The first, *Post-1994*, captures the effect of the Republican takeover on individual roll rates of Republicans.<sup>16</sup> On the

basis of the cartel model's prediction (Hypothesis 2b), we expect this coefficient to be negative and significant. Second, we look at the coefficient for *Dem\*Post-1994*.<sup>17</sup> The coefficient for *Dem\*Post-1994*, when summed with the coefficient on *Post-1994*, captures the effect of the party control switch on Democrats' roll rates.<sup>18</sup> For the cartel model's prediction (Hypotheses 2a and 2b), the sum of the coefficients should be positive and significant. For the pure preference model's prediction (Hypothesis 1), we include a variable (*Distance*) that measures the distance between individuals and the floor median.<sup>19</sup> Both models predict this coefficient will be positive and significant.

Table 1 presents the results of this test with separate estimates for each type of vote.<sup>20</sup> For all three vote types, the coefficients of interest are significant and in the expected direction. As the pure preferences model would predict, the farther a member is from the floor median, the more likely he or she is to be rolled. However, the baseline model misses an important piece of the explanation.



**Table 2.** Predicted Probabilities of Individual Rolls Based on Estimation in Table 1

| Member's party                                       | Pre-1994 | Post-1994 |
|--|----------|-----------|
| Probability of being rolled on special rule adoption |          |           |
| Republican   | .607     | .029      |
| Democrat   | .055     | .586      |
| Probability of being rolled on conference report     |          |           |
| Republican   | .313     | .128      |
| Democrat   | .120     | .172      |
| Probability of being rolled on final passage         |          |           |
| Republican   | .341     | .098      |
| Democrat   | .087     | .245      |

Distance<sub>it</sub> is set at median value for members of given party.

Even controlling for distance from the floor medians, legislators are significantly less likely to be rolled if they have the benefit of being in the majority party.

Table 2 compares the predicted probabilities for a Democratic and Republican roll before and after the 1994 election for each vote category.<sup>21</sup> The smallest change for Republicans came on conference report votes, where an individual's predicted probability of being rolled was cut by nearly two-thirds, dropping from .31 to .13. On special rules, the likelihood of a Republican being rolled was 2,000 percent larger in the pre-1994 period than in the post-1994 period, going from .61 in the earlier period to .03 in the later period. For Democrats, their rolls increased tenfold on special rules votes, from .06 to .59, and nearly tripled on final passage votes, from .09 to .25. All told, the pattern is overwhelming. It is clear that majority status has a substantial impact on the likelihood that an individual will be rolled at several key stages of the legislative process.

### *Unequal Protection? Testing the Spatial Implications of Agenda Control*

To test Hypothesis 3a, we construct a measure of a legislator's position vis-à-vis the *protected interval* depicted in Figure 3. For members within the interval, this measure is set equal to zero, while we measure the distance (via first dimension DW-NOMINATE) from the floor median of the majority party median, whichever is closer, for members outside the interval.

We again employ extended beta binomial as our estimation technique, and use a specification similar to that presented in Table 1, with the exception that distance is now replaced by our measure of proximity to the protected interval. We expect the coefficient for this variable to be significant and positive.<sup>22</sup> The results of our models are presented in Table 3.

The results bear out our prediction for each vote type. Note that all of the predictions in Hypotheses 2a and 2b

hold for this specification. Additionally, Hypothesis 3a is borne out: for all three vote types, distance from the protected interval is positively and statistically significantly associated with individual roll rates. One interesting aspect of the results in Table 3 is that the effect of proximity to the protected interval on roll rates is substantially lower for special rule adoptions than for votes on final passage or conference reports.

Hypothesis 3b presents a hierarchy as to which members receive more or less protection against being rolled on the basis of their position in the policy space. Members between the floor median and the majority party median still receive the most protection, but a set of members who occupy the extreme wing of the majority also receive some level of protection from being rolled. To test this proposition, we estimate two additional models, by splitting our data into the pre-1994 and post-1994 portions of our sample. The specification of these models is straightforward, with the two dichotomous independent variables capturing members within the protected interval and members at the extreme end of the majority's spectrum (far-left interval pre-1994 and far-right interval post-1994).<sup>23</sup> Our excluded category captures all other members, who receive no protection from being rolled under the party cartel theory. The results, again using extended beta binomial, are presented in Tables 4 and 5. Our expectations are that the coefficients for both the protected interval and far-left and far-right variables should be significant and negative and that the coefficient for the protected interval should be significantly different from the coefficients for the far-left and far-right variables in a negative direction.<sup>24</sup>

Table 4 shows mixed results for the era of Democratic control. For all vote types, our expectation of lower roll rates for protected and far-left members is borne out. The results are not as clear comparing between these categories, however. For special rules, the chi-square test is marginally significant, but in the wrong direction. Final passage votes yield a result opposite the hypothesized

**Table 3.** The Effect of the 1994 Election on Republican and Democratic Individual Roll Rates

| Rollrate <sub>it</sub>                            | Model 1: Special rule adoption | Model 2: Final passage | Model 3: Conference report |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Dem   |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | -2.725                         | -0.913                 | -0.434                     |
| SE  | 0.038                          | 0.035                  | 0.051                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Post-1994 $\beta_2$ (-)                           |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | -3.406                         | -0.784                 | -0.338                     |
| SE  | 0.048                          | 0.037                  | 0.056                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Dem*Post-1994                                     |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | 6.078                          | 1.256                  | 0.008                      |
| SE  | 0.072                          | 0.051                  | 0.102                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.941                      |
| Distance from floor median                        |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | 2.528                          | 3.427                  | 3.462                      |
| SE  | 0.062                          | 0.061                  | 0.095                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Constant  |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | -0.538                         | -1.992                 | -2.137                     |
| SE  | 0.033                          | 0.035                  | 0.053                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| $\gamma$  |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | 0.026                          | 0.030                  | 0.069                      |
| SE  | 0.001                          | 0.001                  | 0.002                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Post-1994 + Dem*Post-1994 $\beta_2 + \beta_3$ (+) |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                                       | 2.672                          | 0.471                  | 0.331                      |
| SE  | 0.041                          | 0.039                  | 0.060                      |
| p   | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| N   | 3,517                          | 3,517                  | 3,517                      |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                             | 0.453                          | 0.204                  | 0.164                      |
| Log likelihood                                    | -96168.73                      | -156415.91             | -58862.51                  |

Dependent variable: Individual roll rate. Estimation technique: extended beta binomial.

direction. Only for conference reports is our expectation confirmed.

Table 5 shows our results for the era of Republican control and provides some stronger evidence supporting Hypothesis 3b. For both final passage votes and conference reports, our hypothesis is supported. But once again, special rules votes seem to present a confounding case. While in the expected direction, the difference between the coefficients for protected members and far-right members is not significant.

The results of this set of tests reveal two apparent puzzles for partisan theories. First, it does not seem to matter whether one is extreme or moderate on special rules; on the majority party side of the floor median, individual roll rates are uniformly lower than on the opposite side. We believe that the unique nature of special rules makes the confounding results explicable. Special rules votes are typically straight party-line votes. This would tend to

work against any mechanism offering differential protection from being rolled, since everyone is voting the same way on special rules. Thus, we need an alternative theoretical framework to explain individual roll rates on special rules. We leave the development of this framework for future work.

Second, we find that in the pre-1994 era, individual roll rates are actually lower in the far-left interval than in the protected interval for final passage votes. This is puzzling given that the relationship seems to be the opposite for conference report votes. While our predictions are not borne out by the results, we would point to the other findings that do support our predictions while also emphasizing that the partyless perspective is less able to explain this contrary finding than a perspective that takes party effects seriously. Although by no means definitive, we speculate as to how we might begin to fine-tune our theory to better explain these results. By the end of some

**Table 4.** The Effect of the Intervals on Pre-1994 Individual Roll Rates

| Rollrate <sub>it</sub>                 | Model 1: Special rule adoption | Model 2: Final passage | Model 3: Conference report |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Within protected interval              |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                            | -2.464                         | -1.694                 | -2.162                     |
| SE                                     | 0.070                          | 0.056                  | 0.048                      |
| p                                      | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Far-left interval                      |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                            | -2.593                         | -1.978                 | -1.767                     |
| SE                                     | 0.063                          | 0.051                  | 0.042                      |
| p                                      | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Constant                               |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                            | 0.135                          | -0.528                 | -0.500                     |
| SE                                     | 0.029                          | 0.023                  | 0.018                      |
| p                                      | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| $\gamma$                               |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                            | 0.217                          | 0.111                  | 0.061                      |
| SE                                     | 0.008                          | 0.004                  | 0.002                      |
| p                                      | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Protected interval < far-left interval |                                |                        |                            |
| Chi-square                             | 2.820                          | 18.790                 | 7.230                      |
| p                                      | 0.093                          | 0.000                  | 0.007                      |
| N                                      | 1,766                          | 1,766                  | 1,766                      |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                  | 0.406                          | 0.221                  | 0.177                      |
| Log likelihood                         | -49682.32                      | -70564.31              | -30789.92                  |

Dependent variable: Individual roll rate. Estimation technique: extended beta binomial.

**Table 5.** The Effect of the Intervals on Post-1994 Individual Roll Rates

| Rollrate <sub>it</sub>                  | Model 1: Special rule adoption | Model 2: Final passage | Model 3: Conference report |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Within protected interval               |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                             | -3.924                         | -2.162                 | -1.786                     |
| SE                                      | 0.071                          | 0.048                  | 0.066                      |
| p                                       | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Far-right interval                      |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                             | -3.896                         | -1.767                 | -0.875                     |
| SE                                      | 0.068                          | 0.042                  | 0.051                      |
| p                                       | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Constant                                |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                             | 0.655                          | -0.500                 | -0.895                     |
| SE                                      | 0.023                          | 0.018                  | 0.026                      |
| p                                       | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| $\gamma$                                |                                |                        |                            |
| Coefficient                             | 0.104                          | 0.061                  | 0.115                      |
| SE                                      | 0.005                          | 0.002                  | 0.005                      |
| p                                       | 0.000                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| Protected interval < far-right interval |                                |                        |                            |
| Chi-square                              | 0.120                          | 48.170                 | 153.150                    |
| p                                       | 0.730                          | 0.000                  | 0.000                      |
| N                                       | 1,773                          | 1,773                  | 1,773                      |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                   | 0.473                          | 0.177                  | 0.138                      |
| Log likelihood                          | -48428.77                      | -87161.28              | -28652.41                  |

Dependent variable: Individual roll rate. Estimation technique: extended beta binomial.

**Table 6.** Summary of Findings

| Partisan hypothesis   | Preferences argument  | Empirical result   |   |          |
|---|---|--|---|----------|
|   |   | FPV  | Rules   | Conf Rep |
| Roll rates increase with distance from F, but majority status mitigates the effect of distance        | Equally distant members should have the same roll rate                  | Partisan   | Partisan  | Partisan |
| Individual roll rates are zero between F and M, but increase in distance from this interval           | Roll rates should increase in distance from F even within this interval | Partisan   | Partisan, although distance from interval has weaker effect than for other vote types | Partisan |
| Roll rates to minority side of F highest, to extreme side of M next, within protected interval lowest | No distinction should exist between equally distant members             | Mixed: Extreme majority party members do better than predicted | Mixed: Extreme majority party members do better than predicted                        | Partisan |

Note: FPV = final passage vote; Conf Rep = conference report; F = floor median; M = majority party median.

four decades of Democratic rule in the House, it is likely that most of the status quos that the whole party agreed on had been addressed by new policies. Thus, the remaining distribution of status quos might have been such that the party moved to satisfy more extreme members at the expense of moderates. Once the Republicans came to power, there were plenty of “easy” status quos from their perspective, and individual roll rates returned to what was expected.

To summarize, we briefly present our findings directly relevant to the parties-preferences debate in Table 6. It includes a summary, starting with our core hypotheses in the first column, the pure preferences response, and three columns showing which side is supported for each vote type. Although our results are somewhat mixed, the pure preferences argument cannot begin to explain the pattern of findings that we present. Indeed, the results still point to majority-party advantage, although the shape of that advantage does not precisely conform to the predictions of the party cartel model in all contexts. Moreover, our results do highlight the main point of the paper: negative agenda control does not affect majority party members equally. Depending on which status quo, or set of status quos, the party wishes to address, the leadership’s ability to keep things off the floor disproportionately protects some while leaving others vulnerable.

## Conclusion

At the outset of our article, we posed two questions in connection with the Republican revolution that occurred following the 1994 election. First, did the Republican leadership reap the rewards of majority status via a change in agenda control, as would be predicted by partisan theories?

The analysis presented here suggests that the answer is yes. Democrats’ probability of being rolled increased dramatically on special rule adoption votes (from .06 to .57), final passage votes (from .09 to .25), and conference report adoption votes (from .12 to .17), while Republicans’ individual roll rates fell precipitously in each vote category (from .61 to .03, .34 to .10, and .31 to .13, respectively). Furthermore, these results account for the baseline prediction of individual roll rates derived from a pure preference model of agenda control in the House.

Second, we asked whether the agenda control behavior of House Republicans in the years following their election victory in 1994 was noticeably different from that exhibited by the Democratic leadership prior to the transfer of power. To a certain extent, our analysis suggests that the answer to this question is no. Nevertheless, the evidence remains, at best, mixed. While the majority Republicans’ roll rates were lower than their Democratic predecessors, the Democrats as minority party also had lower roll rates than those of minority party Republicans in the pre-1994 period. Furthermore, when we look at the predicted probabilities of roll rates on different types of votes across the two periods, the differences in majority and minority party roll rates appear quite mild.

In terms of future research, we think a comparative analysis of roll rates in the U.S. Senate would offer additional insights into how interchamber differences affect agenda control in Congress. The Senate majority party leadership faces different constraints in terms of exercising control of the legislative agenda, and we believe it would be instructive to conduct a systematic investigation of individual roll rates within the upper chamber. Indeed, one such study takes advantage of the unique opportunity to see how a change in partisan control of the

Senate following the Jeffords switch in 2001 affected who won and who lost in terms of the legislative agenda (Den Hartog 2005a). Working backward to look at other changes in control of the Senate, such as the 1980 and 1994 elections, would offer potentially fruitful corollaries. Examining these and other related questions in the context of congressional politics would help us further refine existing theoretical accounts of legislative behavior in Congress.

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### Notes

1. Republicans gained five additional seats because Democrats Nathan Deal (GA), Jimmy Hayes (LA), Greg Laughlin (TX), Mike Parker (MS), and Billy Tauzin (LA) switched parties.
2. Charles Babington, "Hastert Launches a Partisan Policy," *Washington Post*, November 27, 2004, p. A01.
3. Although we couch our discussion in terms of Cox and McCubbins's (2002, 2005) cartel model, we view our argument as consistent with Aldrich and Rohde's (2001) conditional party government argument.
4. See Cox and McCubbins (2005, 233) for more details about different types of wins and losses.
5. We say *usually* here as there may be instances where, for position-taking purposes, members might want to allow something onto the agenda so that they can vote against it without regard to whether it passes or fails.
6. The slope and linearity of the lines is a function of an implicitly assumed uniform distribution of status quos. However, the basic prediction holds even when we relax this assumption.
7. The assumption that bill proposals will end up at the floor median's ideal point follows from the implicit premise that bills are considered under an open rule on the floor. This is a standard assumption in the literature (see, e.g., Krehbiel 1991; Cox and McCubbins 2002).
8. Note, though, that in any instance where the individual's ideal point is between the status quo and the floor median, but closer to the status quo, he or she will also be rolled.
9. This assumption follows others who have developed models of policy in a single dimension. See, in particular, Krehbiel (1996) and Chiou and Rothenberg (2003).
10. Note that Cox and McCubbins (n.d.) have also adapted their model to the context of individual roll rates.
11. We might expect to see a disparity in individual roll rates absent any agenda control, on the basis of party voting achieved through arm twisting, side payments, and so on. But if we retain the assumption of sincere voting on final passage, then a party voting story becomes very difficult to tell. Absent agenda control, bills should be proposed at the floor median's ideal point (F), and all members who prefer F to the status quo should vote for the bill. We would see a slight difference in individual roll rates between the parties, since the majority party occupies F, and thus has one member who is never rolled. But this cannot explain the significant partisan disparity we find.
12. The principles apply equally well to the case of a Republican majority.
13. To elaborate a bit more, we expect final passage votes and conference report adoptions to behave similarly with respect to differences across the majority and minority parties, and within the parties with respect to individuals' ideological preferences. At the core, final passage and conference report votes are about the substantive choice between a status quo and an alternative proposal. Rules votes are not substantive choices in and of themselves, but they are instrumental in producing substantive outcomes, by laying the groundwork for later substantive choices. The party-line nature of rules votes means that the roll rates of moderate and extreme party members ought to look the same on these types of votes.
14. So, if in a given Congress an individual participated in two hundred final passage votes, and was rolled on one hundred of those votes, that individual's roll rate would be .5. Note that the denominator can vary between individuals on the same type of vote for the same Congress, due to members. Furthermore, the denominator (and of course the numerator) almost certainly does vary for the same member across different vote types in a given Congress. That is, we calculate roll rates for final passage votes, special rule adoptions, and conference report adoptions separately.
15. The estimation technique accounts for nonindependence across vote decisions. See Cox and McCubbins (2005) for a related discussion of applying extended beta binomial to roll rates.
16. Specifically, the variable takes on the value 1 for the 104th through 107th Congresses and 0 otherwise.
17. The variable Dem is coded 1 for Democrats or independents who caucus with the Democrats and 0 otherwise.



19. To see why this is the case, think about the values that each variable (ignoring distance) takes for a pre-1994 Democrat and a post-1994 Democrat. Pre-1994, a Democrat's roll rate is  $\alpha + \beta_1 \text{Dem}_{it}$  (as both Post-1994 and  $\text{Dem} * \text{Post-1994}$  will equal zero). Post-1994, a Democrat's roll rate is  $\alpha + \beta_1 \text{Dem}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Post-1994}_i + \beta_3 \text{Dem}_{it} * \text{Post-1994}_i$ ; thus, the sum of the last two terms is the difference between a Democrat's pre-1994 and post-1994 roll rate.
20. This is the absolute value of the first dimension DW-NOMINATE score of the floor median for each Congress minus each legislator's first dimension DW-NOMINATE score.
21. We fit the same models using ordinary least squares in Table A1 (see appendix at <http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/>). The results are substantively similar.
22. To calculate these predicted probabilities, we held  $\text{Distan}_{it}$  at its median value for each party.
23. This measure increases in magnitude the farther a member is from the interval, thus our expectation that this variable is positively associated with individual roll rates.
24. That is, members with DW-NOMINATE scores on the first dimension that fall between the floor and majority medians are coded 1 for within the protected interval and 0 otherwise. For the far-left interval and far-right interval variables, members are coded 1 if they have NOMINATE scores to the extreme of the majority medians in the pre- and post-1994 periods and 0 otherwise.
25. We must look in two places in Tables 4 and 5 to test Hypothesis 3b. We assess the differences from the excluded category by looking at the coefficients of our independent variable, and then we assess the difference *between* them by first confirming the direction of the difference and then looking down the table at the chi-square test of equivalence of the coefficients.

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