

Measuring Conditional Party Government*

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Abstract

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In this paper, we extend our theory and measurement of conditional party government. We define the “condition” in conditional party government more precisely, offering a formal illustration that indicates how, when the condition is more rather than less well satisfied, the majority party may skew outcomes from the center of the floor toward the center of their party. We then provide a number of measures designed to illustrate variation in the degree to which this condition has been satisfied in post-War Congresses. The evidence suggests that the condition was relatively more fully satisfied in the early post-War years, its degree of satisfaction declined in the 1960s and 1970s, from which point its degree of satisfaction increased. By the mid-1990s, the condition was at a (relative) peak of satisfaction. Finally, we examine variations over time in two variables concerning the intra-legislative party to provide at least a preliminary indication whether partisan rules and powers might have been used to achieve majority party preferred outcomes. As our theory predicts, their use increased as the degree to which the condition was satisfied increased.

Measuring Conditional Party Government

Introduction

Shepsle (1989) employed the metaphor of the “textbook” Congress to describe a set of beliefs held by congressional scholars about the patterns of structure, process, and outcomes characteristic of the Congress (usually the House) at any given time. His use of the term was in an account of how this textbook view can change, and in the case illustrated had changed. Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s, the textbook view of structure was that of a House dominated by geography and committees, with party hovering in the background. More recently, the House has seen the party move more to share the foreground with geography, while the importance of committees has receded somewhat.

In our prior work (1996a; 1996b; 1997; 1997-98), we have made comparable arguments about the changing importance of various features of the House. Most especially, we have argued that the relative importance of the political party in the Congress has waxed and waned. Following Rohde (1991), we have called the account “conditional party government,” and we have suggested that the importance of party varies with the degree to which the condition in conditional party government is satisfied. In this paper, we seek to develop ways to measure this condition and its changing degrees of satisfaction over the time, specifically over the 25 congresses of the post-War era. To do this, we need to define conditional party government more precisely, and we offer here two propositions (one new, one from 1997b) that illustrate the concept. We then develop a measurement strategy and apply it to these 25 congresses. We complete the account by comparing the resulting variation in the apparent strength of conditional

party government to several measures of the use of the procedures of the House to implement party positions. We hasten to add, however, that our theory is predicated on an understanding that the importance of party will vary over time, but that the importance of the party, and use of resources held by the party, will vary cross-sectionally. That is, there will be predictable patterns in the degree to which the party leadership uses its powers and resources on different types of legislation within the same Congress. We reserve that inquiry, however, for another paper.

Theory

The theory of conditional party government begins with the policy preferences Members bring with them to the House and which they would choose to reveal in voting and other policy-making actions. These preferences may contain a healthy component of the Member's personal views. Indeed, many Members entered politics in the first place because of their policy beliefs. Still, a second, potentially independent source of a Member's policy preferences, and an explanation of why a Member with these particular policy views (if he or she has them) was chosen in the first place, is the electoral process. Thus implicated are the preferences of the Member's core, primary, election-reelection, and geographic constituencies, resource providers, etc.

Members' behavior, we assume, may also be shaped to a considerable degree by the legislative party. Parties as electoral institutions likely have a larger impact on behavior, presumably revealed primarily in their effect on the preferences the Members bring with them to the Congress, but we take these electoral forces as exogenous for our purposes here. We do

assume, in addition, that the parties may have considerable effect on Members' behavior through their partisan legislative institutions. Further, the relative effectiveness of the party as a legislative institution is partially endogenous. It is endogenous to the degree to which the condition in conditional party government is satisfied. This degree of satisfaction is, we presume, due to electoral forces and/or ideological commitments of the candidates. That is, the electoral and internal, legislative party are closely related.

The condition in conditional party government concerns the distribution of policy preferences in the two parties. It is increasingly well satisfied the more homogenous the preferences of Members are within each party (especially the majority party), and the more different the preferences are between the two parties' Members. The more one party agrees that it wants outcomes that are different from those desired by the opposition, the more the condition is satisfied.

Three sets of consequences flow from the increasing degree to which this condition is satisfied. First, Members of a party are increasingly likely to chose to provide their legislative party institutions and party leadership with stronger rules and with greater resources, the greater the degree to which the condition is met. Second, the party will be expected to employ those powers and resources more often, the greater the satisfaction of the condition. Third, provided that the majority party has, by virtue of its being the majority party that organizes the House, more powers and resources to employ than the minority party, then legislation should reveal that fact. In particular, the greater the degree of satisfaction of the condition in conditional party government, the farther policy outcomes should be skewed from the center of the whole

Congress toward the center of opinion in the majority party. This policy consequence can be seen as a tug-of-war between the policy center of the House as a whole that, even in multi-dimensional policy spaces, likely exerts considerable centripetal tendencies. Countering that force is the centrifugal pull towards the center of the majority party, a centrifugal force that should increase with increasing strength of the majority party.

Two Formal Illustrations

A Unidimensional Example of Conditional Party Government: Aldrich (1995) claimed that, if the policy space is effectively unidimensional, then there would be no incentives for party formation. To the contrary, we earlier demonstrated (1997) that, at least given that there are two parties, there still may be incentives for Members to strengthen the legislative party in a unidimensional policy world. These incentives will increase as the degree of satisfaction of the condition in conditional party government increases. This case is one of the empowerment of a collective organization to provide collective goods more effectively. Thus, it is concerned with situations in which all in the party can be made better off by acting collectively and by choosing some option closer to the center of the party than toward the center of the floor.¹ Non-organized, individual choices would result in simple, direct spatial voting and thus would lead to the median voter result applying. If instead, the majority party caucused at the outset, they could thereby realize (if true) that there were potential collective gains to be made. They could achieve those gains by contributing powers and resources to the collective agents (the party leadership) of the party. We then show in a simple illustration that all members of the majority party can be made better off contributing and re-allocating to compensate marginal (moderate) members for voting

for options closer to the center of the party than by voting the party affiliates' individual preferences.

A Two-Dimensional Example of Conditional Party Government: The following two-dimensional example provides an even clearer illustration of the workings of conditional party government and the nature of the condition, doing so purely within the spatial voting theory context.² Consider a three-person legislature, with two members of the majority party (r_1 and r_2) and one minority party member (d_1). Let us begin with the distribution of ideal points that would be the farthest from satisfying the condition in conditional party government. In particular, let the ideal points be at the vertices of an equilateral triangle. Thus there is no greater commonality of preferences between the members of party r than either have with party d 's representative. Suppose that each representative has preferences that decline linearly with increasing distance (simple Euclidean or "Type I" utility). Thus, nothing distinguishes members of this simple legislature but their party label. Finally, let the status quo point (x_s) be at the exact center of the triangle (see Figure 1).³

In accord with Aldrich (1994), let the majority party be able to propose a bill, and the minority party be able to propose an amendment (with agenda control possible through, for example, control of committees and their chairs). The bill must be able to pass, of course, and it also must make (at least a majority in) the majority party better off, or they would not propose it. The amendment must do likewise for the minority party. That is the amendment must be feasible (it will pass by beating the bill and the status quo), and it must be desirable (the minority

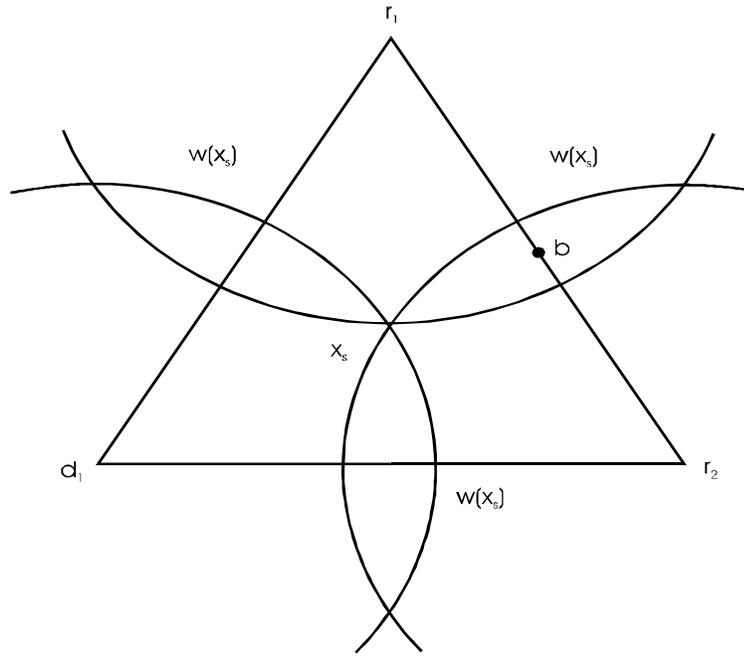


Figure 1: Parties in a Three-Person Legislature, Part 1

party must prefer it to what would otherwise be the outcome). The players can also look ahead (or, more accurately, reason by backwards induction). Point b in Figure 1 is a possible bill to propose. It is in the (majority) win set of the status quo and is thus feasible. It is preferred by both members of party r to the status quo and is thus desirable. The amendment, if any, will be a point in the win set of the bill (it will be adopted over b) and in the win set of the status quo (and thus feasible). A point such as a in Figure 2 satisfies that set of criteria. In this case, therefore, there is no particular advantage to being the majority party and, for that reason, being able to propose the bill. Or rather, it takes even more advantages than yet provided in the example. That is, having more votes and the power to initiate proposals are not sufficient to yield outcomes more favorable to the majority party.⁴ We seek to show, however, that increasing similarity between the two majority party members, and differentiation between each of them and the minority, is sufficient. That is, increasing the degree to which conditional party

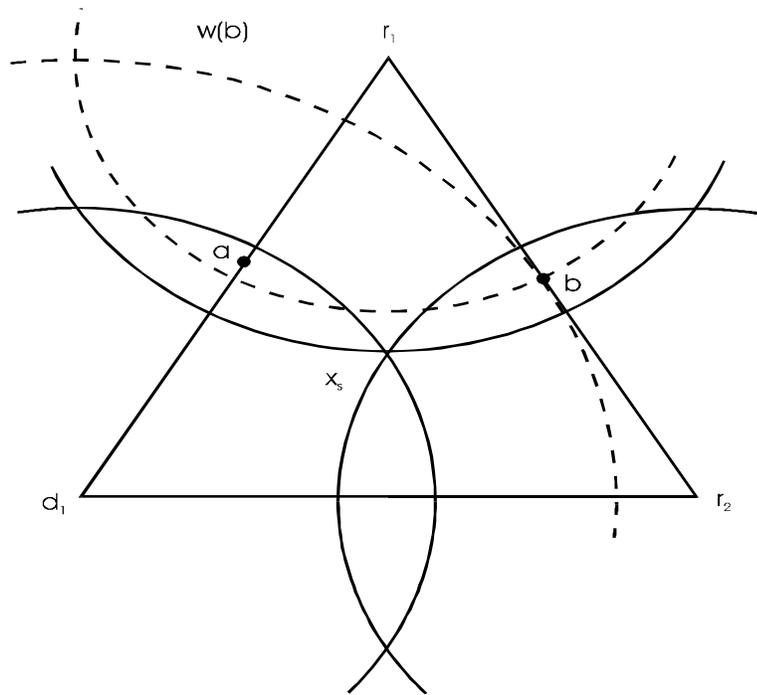


Figure 2: Parties in a Three-Person Legislature, Part 2

government is satisfied yields outcomes that do benefit the majority at the expense of the minority.

Let the equilateral triangle become an isosceles triangle, with the ideal points of members of party r relatively closer together and thereby being relatively farther from that of the minority party member, as in Figure 3. Figure 3 was drawn so that the win set of x_s and the win set of b no longer overlap. Put alternatively, there is no longer an amendment that d_1 can offer that both defeats b (i.e., that she can get a member of party r to support with her) and defeats the status quo.⁵ Thus, if party r proposes b , it is feasible and, for them, desirable to the status quo, and the minority party has no amendment to offer to make anyone in party r better off. Thus, as the

condition in conditional party government has become increasingly well satisfied, there emerged an equilibrium outcome that, in this instance at least, changed the status quo from one at the center of preferences for the whole Congress to one that at the center of the majority party.

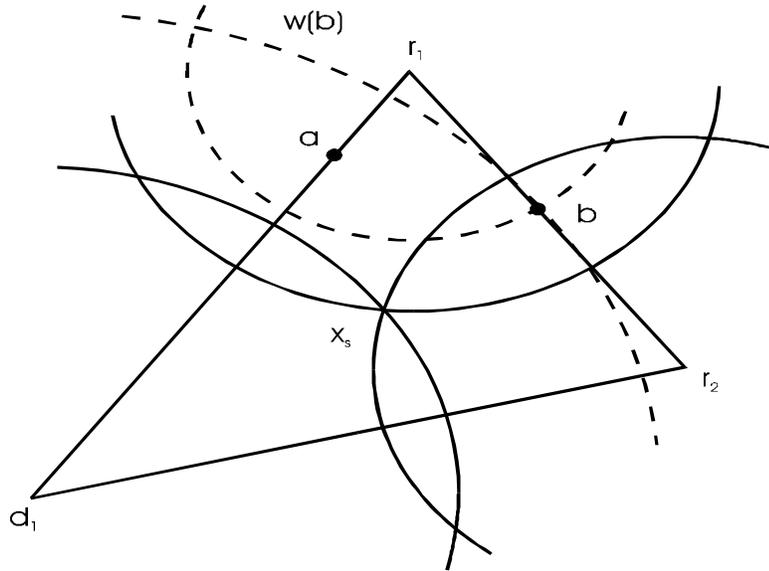


Figure 3: Parties in a Three-Person Legislature, Part 3

To sum up the example: Assume that a majority party has the power to propose (or to fail to propose) changes in the status quo, presumably through control of the committee system. Also assume that the minority has the power to propose (or fail to propose) amendments to any bill the majority offers. In all cases, members are free to choose whatever option they might like to propose, and in all cases, members simply vote their preferences. Then, in the complete absence of satisfaction of the condition, the majority party was not advantaged unless it had some additional power, e.g., the power to impose a rule that limited amendments to germane ones only. If the condition was better satisfied, however, the majority was able to secure more

collectively and move outcomes quite far from the center. This circumstance differs from a decision due to preferences alone, because of the agenda control powers held by the majority.

There are **two** distinct situations in which the distribution of preferences in Figure 1 increasingly satisfies the condition. One is as drawn in Figure 3, that is, when elections select majority party members whose ideal points are located closer to those of their partisans than to the opposition. A second and potentially distinctive case is when ideal preferences are, as in Figure 1, distributed such that there is no intra-party homogeneity, but in which all members share a weighting of the dimensions that differs from equal saliency of the two dimensions. In particular, consider the hypothetical line passing through d_1 and b . This line is the dimension of party cleavage, that is, the dimension that distinguished the preferences of members of party r from those of members of party d . The second dimension runs through the ideal points of the two members of the majority party and is, thus, the line of division within the majority party. If ideal points are distributed as in Figure 1 but the party cleavage dimension is weighted more heavily in all members' utility functions, then Figure 1 with unequal saliency is identical to the case in Figure 3, and party d has no feasible amendment it would desire to offer.⁶ This weighting of partisan cleavages more strongly than intra-party divisions is a likely consequence of elections, as well. After all, the general election is fought between candidates of the two parties, so that the campaigns are likely to "prime" the electorate to consider party cleavages more important. Thus, elections could induce satisfaction of the condition either through affecting the distribution of ideal points, or shaping the importance of dimensions, or both.

Measuring the Variation in Conditional Party Government over Time

Measuring the Condition, per se: In this section we report some measures of the degree to which the condition in conditional party government has been satisfied in the U.S. House.⁷ We do not offer an absolute measure, permitting us, for example, to say that the condition is 83% satisfied. We are, however, able to compare variation in these measures over the post-War era (more accurately, from the 80th through the 104th Congresses). We would ideally like an exogenously determined measure of Member's preferences. Many use estimated ideal point positions from the procedure developed by Poole and Rosenthal (1985; 1997), and we will do so here, as well. We have also performed all analyses on an alternative method recently developed by Heckman and Snyder (1997; see also Snyder and Groseclose, 1997).

Krehbiel has recently (1998) critiqued the use of voting based measures of party, such as party unity scores and the like. What we perceive to be the central claims of his argument in that work should apply in at least some measure to these two measures (which we refer to as the Poole and the Snyder data, for convenience). In our way of putting the argument, these ideal point estimates are based on votes taken at the end of the democratic (i.e., electoral and legislative) process. Thus, these measures of roll call voting include within their determination all those elements that go into the preferences MC's would like to express in voting (their own preferences, those induced by constituents, etc.). But they also include the impact, if any, of institutional structure, whether norms induced by, say, committee structures, effects of partisan actions within the House, the consequences from bicameralism, and/or the influence of the president. Any one set of observations, such as roll call votes, must therefore be considered a

complex mix of preferences and institutional considerations, inter alia. For purposes of this section, however, we will follow convention and consider them as close to measures of preference as can be obtained systematically. We will return to these considerations in the next section.

We therefore use as our basic data the ideal point locations, as estimated by Poole and Snyder, from their respective first dimensions.⁸ In both cases, that first dimension is the one most closely associated with party cleavages.⁹ We then have developed a number of summary measures based on the distribution of ideal points for all Members and the distributions of each party's affiliates. The full distributions of ideal point estimates by party for each of the 25 Congresses are reproduced in an Appendix (available in the on-line version of this paper, as well as being available upon request).

We report the distribution over time of the following measures (in no particular order):

1. The difference between the location of the median Democrat and the median Republican.¹⁰ This measure gets at one aspect of inter-party heterogeneity.
2. The ratio of the standard deviation of ideal points in the Democratic party to that of the full House, which indicates variation in intra-party homogeneity.¹¹
3. The proportion of overlap between the two parties' distribution of ideal points subtracted from one. Overlap is measured by the minimum number of ideal points that would have to be changed to yield a complete separation of the two parties, with all Democrats' ideal points being to the left of all Republicans' ideal points.

4. The R^2 resulting from regressing the Member's ideal point location on party affiliation.

Each of these tap different aspects of the condition, and collectively they cumulate to a reasonably full picture of how well or poorly the condition is satisfied in each Congress.

These measures are reported in Figures 4 and 5, for the Poole and Snyder data, respectively. While these two sets of estimates are not identical, they share a basic structure that is visually evident in all four measures. The condition was at a relatively high degree of satisfaction in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This degree of satisfaction slumped in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. It began to climb again in the 1980s and returned to another relative high point from about the 100th Congress through the 104th Congress. The decline appears a bit sharper in the Snyder data. Perhaps the R^2 measure is most easily comparable. In Snyder, it goes from the .9 ranges, dropping to .31 in the 91st Congress, and returning to the .9 levels at the end. With the Poole estimates, the variation is from .74 in the 80th Congress, dropping to .42 in the 92nd Congress, and then climbing to .86 in the 104th Congress. Just what these numbers mean can perhaps best be appreciated by a visual representation. In Figure 6A, we reproduce the distribution of ideal points as estimated by Poole and Rosenthal for their first dimension for two Congresses, while 6B contains comparable reporting for the Heckman-Snyder data. One of the two Congresses is the 92nd, that is among the most heterogeneous cases for ideal points among the majority party, while the other is the 104th, in which the condition is as well approximated as in any other post-War Congress. The ideal point positions were collapsed into 20 equal units to illustrate the frequency distributions.

Figure 4

Four Measures of Conditional Party Government,
 Poole-Rosenthal Estimates

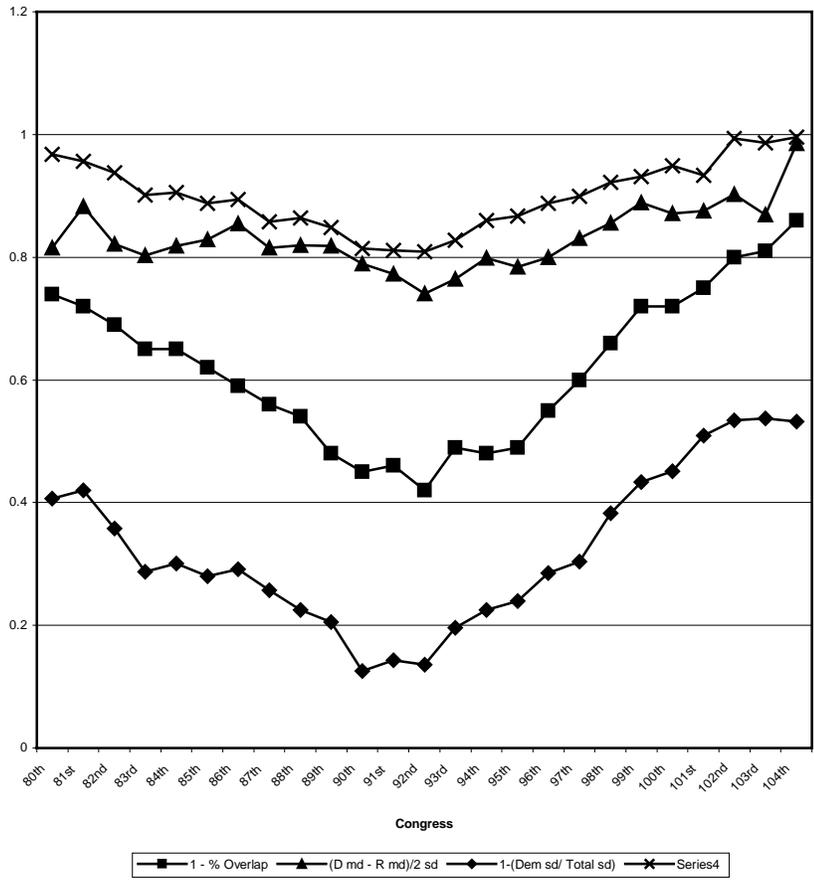


Figure 5

Four Measures of Conditional Party Government,
Heckman-Snyder Estimates

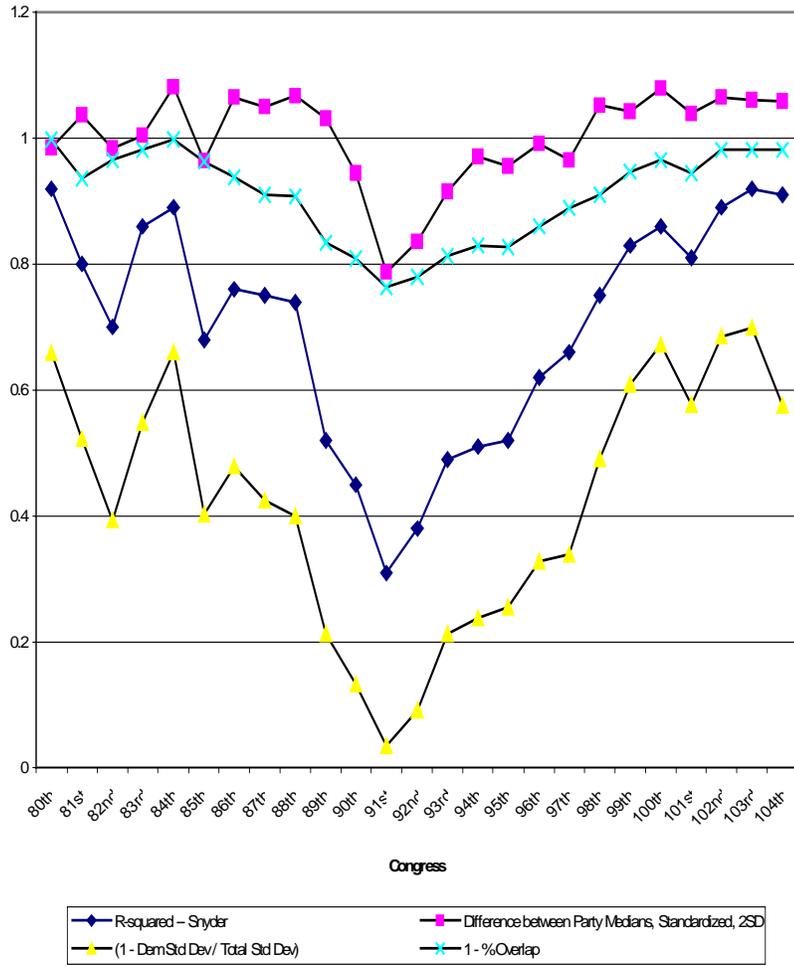


Figure 6

Distributions of Members' Preferences by Party in the 92nd and 104th Congresses

Figure 6A: Poole-Rosenthal Estimates

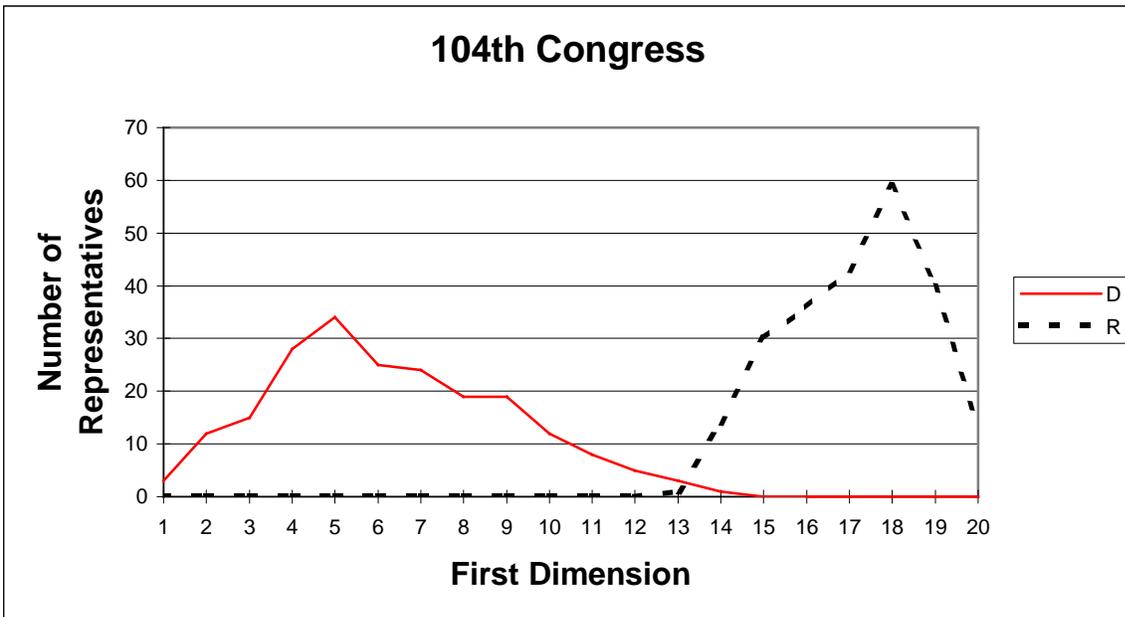
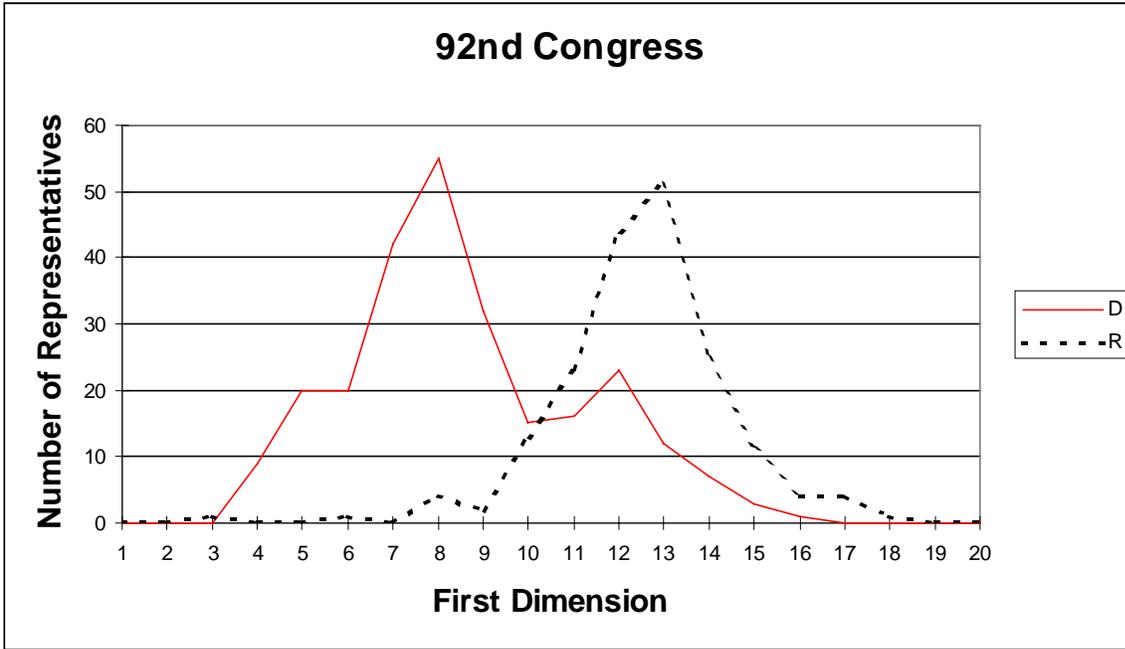
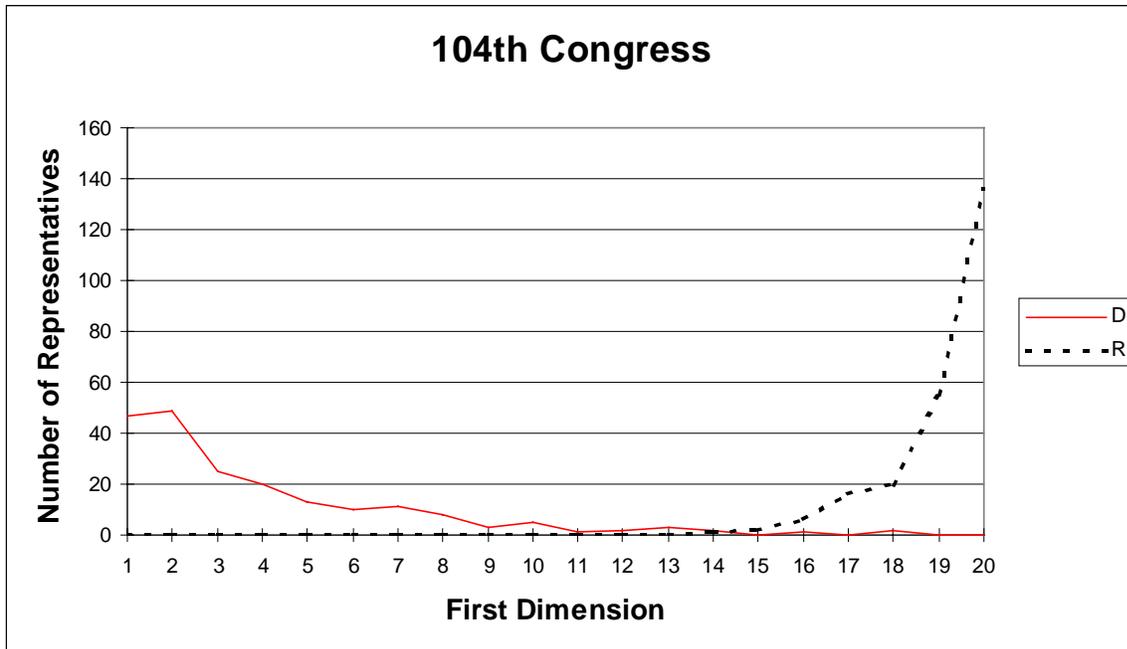
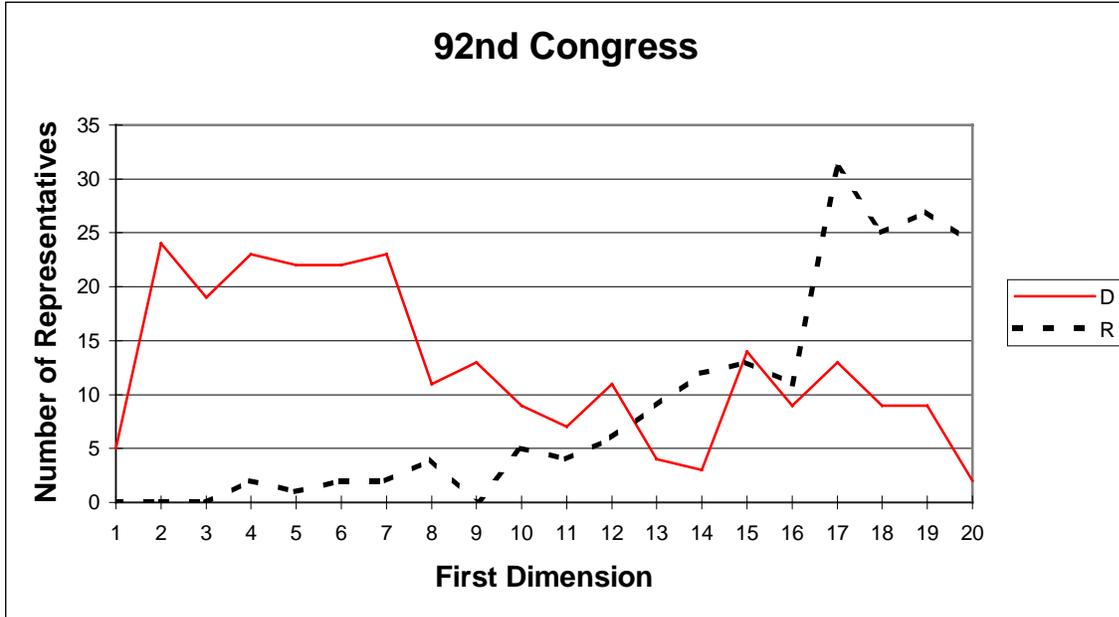


Figure 6B: Heckman-Snyder Estimates



Thus, while the Poole and Snyder estimates are not identical, they reveal a similar pattern. This similarity can be seen by the high inter-item correlations between all pairs of measures, as reported in Table 1. These correlations are high across measures within the same ideal point estimates, as we would expect. They are nearly as high between any measure based on the Poole estimates and any based on the Snyder estimates.

Table 1
Correlations among Four Alternative Measures of
Conditional Party Government, Poole and Snyder Estimates

Poole:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Party Diff.	1							
2. Dem. Std. Dev.	.86	1			.84			
3. R ²	.85	.97	1		.90	.90		
4. Overlap	.83	.96	.97	1	.66	.89	.66	
Snyder								
5. Party Diff.	.61				1			
6. Dem. Std. Dev.	.69	.87			.98	1		
7. R ²	.73	.84	.87		.83	.83	1	
8. Overlap	.64	.78	.88	.85	.75	.94	.96	1

These data support a commonly told story. The parties were reasonably coherent and distinctive after World War II. Moderately strong parties, however, fell on hard times in the late 1960s. In the wake of the Civil Rights movement, Great Society, War in Vietnam, Nixon's southern strategy, and McGovern's candidacy, the Democratic party, in particular, split North and South. The eventual consequences of the reversal of parties on civil rights in the 1960s (see, e.g., Carmines and Stimson, 1989) was a sorting out, such that in time southern Democrats were more moderate, while moderate Republicans lost out to the conservatives, often southern conservatives. The result of this, and numerous other factors (changing agenda, etc.) resulted in

the increasing homogeneity and deepening of party cleavages in the 1980s, culminating in the 100th and 104th Congresses (Rohde, 1991).

The Condition, the Parties, and the Rules: As we noted above, the data in Figures 4 and 5 tell a commonly told story, including reproducing patterns similar to those found in analyzing the various party voting measures. If these estimates are essentially the same as party voting measures, are they vulnerable to Krehbiel's recent critique of those measures (1998)? That is, are these measures also unable to distinguish between Members voting their preferences and Members being influenced to some significant degree by intra-legislative party institutions?

We agree with the basic thrust of his methodological critique – one set of observations so far down the path to legislation surely cannot distinguish all the forces that shape Members' behavior. Even more, the theory of conditional party government demands that Members' preferences and the endogenous rules and powers of the parties be intertwined. It is precisely the fact of increasing satisfaction of the condition that leads Members to seek to strengthen their party in the House, and its decrease leads them to withdraw their support from the internal party structures. The consequence is that the data in Figures 4 and 5 should be understood as something different than a pure measure of preferences. Instead, it should be perceived as a mixture of preferences that are indicating more or less satisfaction of the condition and the impact of the rules and powers by which the parties affiliates are seeking to realize their collective partisan interests, if any.

According to the theory of conditional party government, we should find that the adoption and use of rules should vary in line with, and contribute to, the strength of over-time changes in the Poole and Snyder estimates and the measures of conditional party government we have constructed from them. If party procedures are irrelevant, a la Krehbiel's argument, we should find no relationship between increasing homogeneity in voting and the use of rules and procedures.

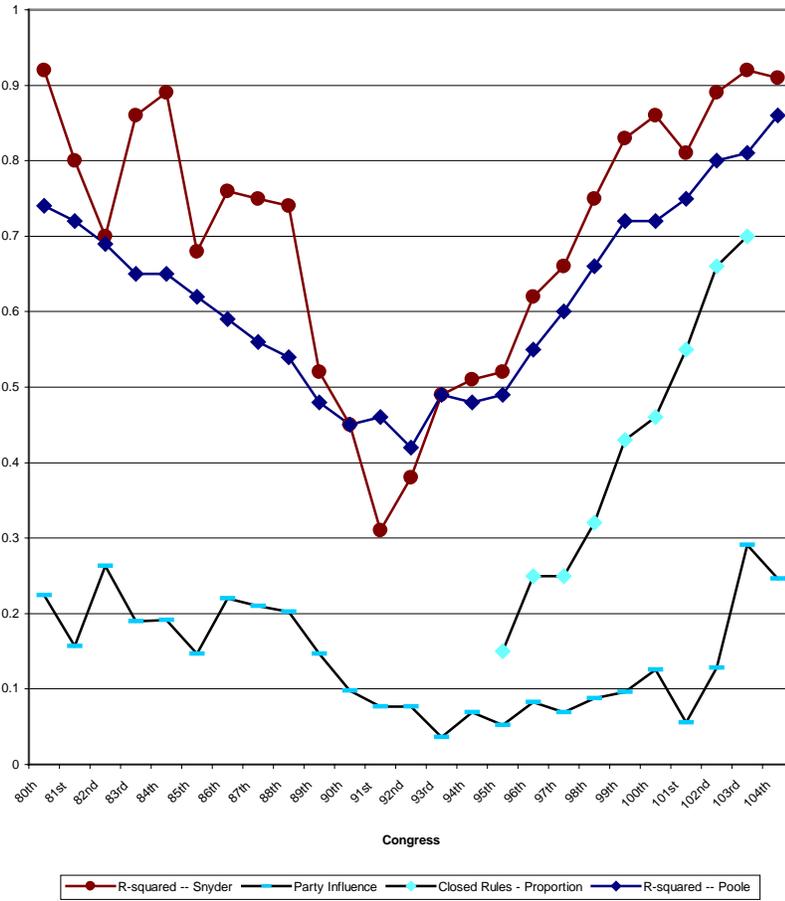
There are two measures of the use of rules, presumably by and for parties, that we have systematically available for at least significant amounts of the time series. One is a short series drawn from Oleszek (1996, Table 5-4, p. 142). There, he reports the percentage of bills that were considered in the 95th through 103rd Congresses under restrictive rules. Thus, these were the percentage of times that floor amendments were limited. It is, of course, not necessarily the case that amendments are restricted to achieve the outcomes preferred by the majority party, rather than restrictions being imposed for some other reason. Still, the Republicans, for example, understood the Democratic majority's use of restrictive rules in partisan terms. Indeed, at the outset of the 104th Congress, they promised to use more open amending procedures, because of the constraints they had so long felt they lived under. Shortly thereafter, however, Democratic tactics under open rules led them to appreciate the majority party's advantage in their use, and the GOP begin to use more restrictive rules more commonly (Aldrich and Rohde, 1997-98). The second measure we use is one developed by Snyder and Groseclose (1997). They develop a "...simple procedure to estimate the extent to which party pressure affects roll-call voting, *independently* of legislators' preferences." (1997, p. 1, italics in original). They are able to estimate this measure of party pressure for both the House and Senate from 1871-1995. They

found that "... party pressure appears to be significant in over 40 percent of the close roll-calls. There are just two Houses – the 42nd and the 93rd – in which significant party pressure is evident on fewer than 30 percent of the close roll-calls." (p. 19). Here, we want to see if the variation in the degree to which there was party pressure varied with the degree to which conditional party government was more nearly approximated.

The results are visually evident in Figure 7. We report there the R^2 measure from the Poole and the Snyder estimates, since they are the most comparable between the two sets of estimates and since they are neither the most nor least variable measure of conditional party government. Of course, the restrictive rule measure is only available for a brief period, but it is clear that it climbs dramatically and in line with increasing conditionality. The relationship with the Snyder-Groselcose, party pressure measure is less visually apparent. Still, it is correlated strongly with the conditional party government measures (e.g., $r = .51$ with Poole and $.60$ with Snyder R^2 , with correlations with the other measures similar, if often slighter smaller). These results support the theory of conditional party government. Precisely when the condition is increasingly well satisfied, the majority party (at least) uses its powers to achieve what are now increasingly evident collective aims among its members.

Figure 7

Measures of Conditional Party Government and the Use of Rules



Source: Poole-Rosenthal and Heckman-Snyder estimates, Snyder-Groszlose estimates (1997), Olesezk (1996)

Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, we have extended and more sharply defined the concept of conditional party government. In particular, we have motivated the theory more clearly. Earlier (1997), we demonstrated that, in a unidimensional policy space, there was at least the possibility (and, at least given that the space was unidimensional, the possibility was realized under seemingly plausible, perhaps even common conditions) of a collective action problem that the party could solve. That is, every member of the majority party could be made better off by acting collectively than by simply voting their preferences. That result did not demonstrate that the party would solve the collective action problem, but indicated under what seemed to be the least likely circumstances (i.e., unidimensionality) for parties to be “strong,” that they could do so.

Here, we extended that theoretical possibility result. We examined a two-dimensional policy space, beginning with no commonality of preferences within the parties and with the status quo already located centrally. We then demonstrated that the majority party could move policy toward outcomes that its members preferred by a combination of preferences and structure. As we might expect, when there was no commonality of preferences, it took a great deal of structure to effect such a move – the majority party not only had more votes, but control of the agenda (presumably through the committee system) and restrictions on amendments (i.e., a strict germaneness rule). As the condition was increasingly satisfied, however, the ability of the majority party to achieve outcomes preferable to its members over the policy center required less structure and resources (e.g., only agenda control, plus the power of numbers and homogeneity of preferences). As the theory of conditional party government predicts, the majority party was

not invulnerable based solely on relatively homogenous preferences. Finally, this example allowed us to demonstrate that the condition could be increasingly well satisfied in two ways. One is the election of Members with ideal point distributions that increasingly reflect the condition – presumably the consequence of the changing nature of southern congressional elections, for example (see Rohde, 1991). The second way is increasing saliency of the dimensions that define partisan cleavages, relative to those that divide (at least) the majority party. This second way sharpens the point that the distribution of policy preferences of Members within the Congress is a consequence of elections, and that elections are also partisan. Thus, the condition may be increasingly well satisfied either by having constituencies elect partisans who hold similar preferences as their peers from elsewhere in the nation, or by having elections that raise the salience of party cleavages, without necessarily imposing uniformity of position on those dimensions. We return to this point below.

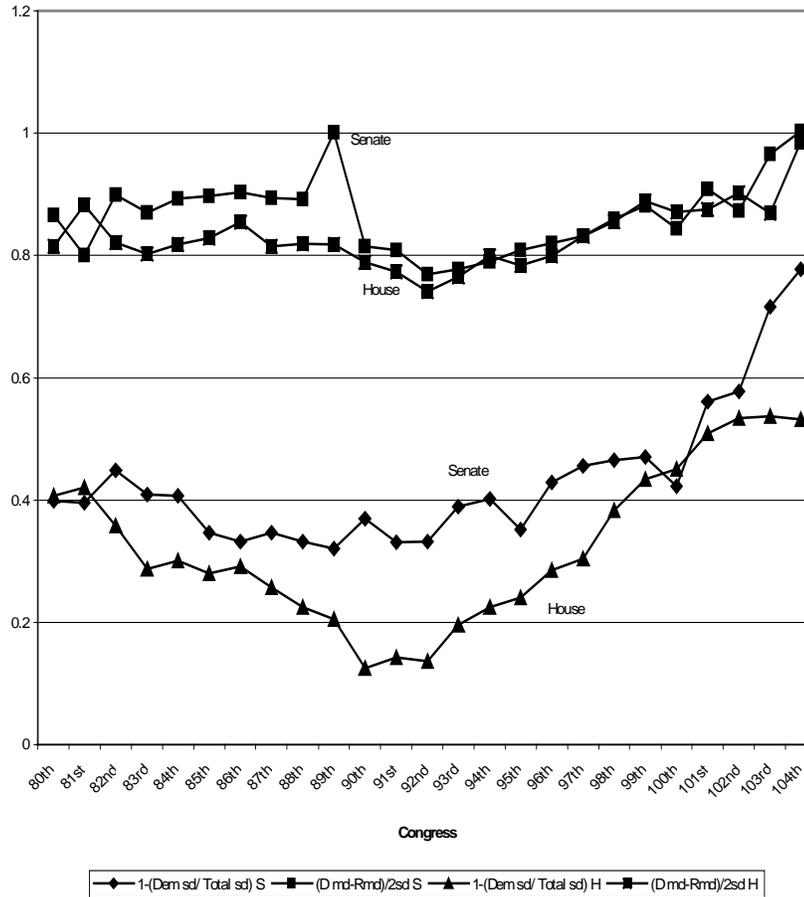
We next examined the Poole and Snyder estimates of ideal points for the Members of the House over the 25 post-World War II Congresses. We examined four summary measures of these distributions (across the primary dimension in both data sets) that tap aspects of the condition in conditional party government. These aspects are how far apart are the typical Democrat and Republican, how much variation is there in the ideal points of members of the majority party, in comparison to the whole House, how much overlap is there of estimated ideal points of Democrats and Republicans, and how strongly is party affiliation related to position on the primary dimension. We then found that there was systematic variation over time in the degree to which these aspects of the condition were satisfied in the post-War years. Starting at a relatively high degree of satisfaction in the 1940s, these measures declined during the late 1960s

and early 1970s, only to climb again in the 1980s, reaching high points in the 100th through 104th Congresses. While there is no absolute measure of the condition, the range of variation in the R^2 measures and the comparison of the actual distribution of ideal point estimates for Congresses at low and high degrees of satisfaction indicate that the variation is genuine and substantial.

The two sets of ideal point estimates do not yield identical results. Nonetheless, the two yield similar patterns of change over time, thus reinforcing the basic conclusion – the condition in conditional party government has been well and poorly satisfied, at least in the Poole and Snyder estimates, over the last fifty years. In Figure 8 we compare two measures of the condition in House and Senate using the Poole estimates. We would not expect that the House and Senate would be identical. Nonetheless, the variation over time is broadly similar. Both House and Senate, by these measures, had relatively unified parties in the 1940s with substantial decline in the late 1960s (perhaps less so in the Senate than in the House) and with a substantial resurgence in the last decade. Indeed, it appears that the Senate may satisfy the condition even more strongly than in the House in the 1990s. This finding reinforces our belief, as we will discuss in more detail shortly, that electoral forces are partisan and that, therefore, the preferences Members bring with them to the Congress are already shaped by partisan institutions, even if those are partisan electoral institutions. It also supports our arguments that we must systematically evaluate the agenda facing the Congress. For example, one reason that Democrats were divided in the 1960s and 1970s was the salience of – and relatively frequent voting on the floor on – civil rights.

Figure 8

**Two Measures of Conditional Party Government:
House and Senate Compared**



Source: Poole-Rosenthal estimates

We have, however, treated the Poole and Snyder ideal point estimates as measures of preference on policy. In fact, of course, they are derived from roll call votes cast on the floor at or near the end of the legislative labyrinth. While these are taken as the “industry standard,” that is, the best available approximation, of preferences, they are nonetheless based on behavior that should incorporate not only “pure” policy preferences (whatever that may be) but also the influence of all structures, institutions, pressures, etc., that arise within the Congress. Thus, they

incorporate any influence of party, committee, lobbyist, presidential influence, etc. In our case, we are particularly concerned with party and, indeed, have as a central part of our theoretical claims the hypothesis that preference and intra-legislative party powers should be closely related. We were able to assess systematically two indicators of intra-chamber rules and powers, and we found them clearly and strongly related to the measures of conditional party government.

The finding that the use of rules and party organizational resources is positively correlated with the measures has two important implications. Methodologically, it supports our understanding of Krehbiel's basic claim (1998) about the use of party or other roll call voting measures. They are not "pure" measures of party strength – or of preferences. Rather they are mixtures of all the forces that shape roll call voting on the floor of the Congress. Theoretically, the correlation between the use of party-controlled resources within the House and both the Poole and Snyder estimates that are based on roll call voting behavior is strong evidence in favor of the theory of conditional party government. The theory predicts that the majority party will want, collectively, to empower their party and use those resources precisely when their preferences yield high degree of satisfaction of the condition.¹²

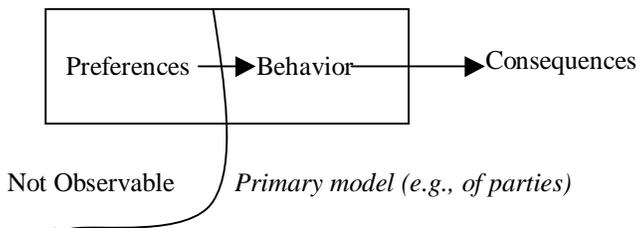
We conclude with a schematic presentation of the theory of conditional party government. In Figure 9A we reproduce Krehbiel's Figure 1 (1998). This figure is his presentation of the measurement problem, that is why it is difficult to infer from examining only roll call voting behavior. Figure 9B presents the theory of conditional party government in schematic form. This figure not only sharpens and extends Krehbiel's measurement problem, but it also raises the theoretical problem. In particular, even if we had a pure measure of policy

preferences, as well as of rules and behavior, the measurement model would still be under-identified. The connection between the electoral and legislative institutions of the party must also be incorporated, both in statistical and in substantive-theoretical terms. Policy preferences are not simply exogenous forces, but rather are the product of party and constituency (inter alia). In the terms of the theory of conditional party government, the degree of satisfaction of the condition is due, at least in part, to the effect of the party-in-elections. Thus, it is no mere coincidence that, with a relative high degree of satisfaction of the condition, partisan Members of Congress empower intra-legislative party organizations. Rather, the party-in-government is strengthened, at least in part, because of the impact of the party-in-elections.

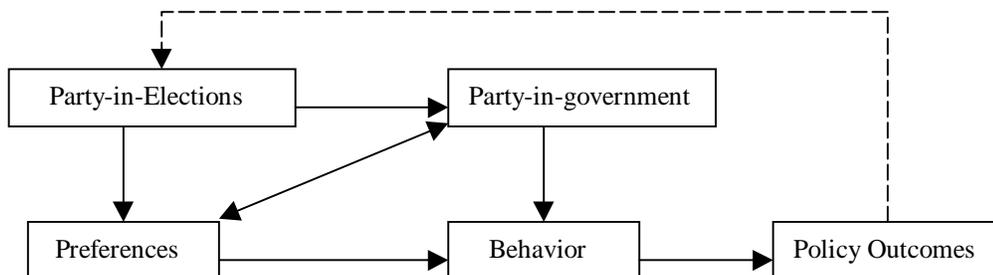
Figure 9
Schematic Representation of Conditional Party Government

9A: Krehbiel's Measurement Problem (1998, Figure 1)

Measurement model



9B: Conditional Party Government



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Endnotes

¹ This is true even for the most moderate members of the majority party, and therefore those most vulnerable to the appeals from the minority to support policies closer to the median of the whole House. Essentially, the more extreme partisans divert the resources granted the party under the conditional party government hypothesis disproportionately toward their more moderate peers.

² We would like to thank Keith Krehbiel for proposing the example in Figure 1. While we illustrate the logic in two-dimensions, there seems to be nothing special about two dimensions, and so we presume it is effectively an n-dimensional example.

³ Technically, the status quo is at the centroid of the ideal points in the policy space. We also assume that x_s is the reversion point.

⁴ A third power, for example the ability to demand that any amendment be germane, if by that we mean that any amendment can only change proposals in the dimensions the proposals themselves seek to change the status quo, is sufficient. With a germaneness rule, amendments are limited. A common spatial interpretation is that only amendments that change along the dimension or dimensions raised by the bill are germane. In this case, the dimension could be the line passing through x_s and b . That is, the dimension is the dimension of party cleavage. If so, amendment a is out of order, and there is only a very small region in which successful amendments can be proposed. Indeed, if an amendment has to be literally on the line between x_s and b , then d_1 has no amendment that makes him or her better off and is also feasible.

⁵ More accurately, there is nothing in the petal of the win set of x_s that includes d_1 as part of its supporting majority and that overlaps with the win set of b .

⁶ That is, if all Members have quadratic-based utility, and the only thing that changes from Figure 1 is an alteration of the quadratic base for determining the metric of distance, changing from the simple to the weighted Euclidean norm of distance, then there is a transformation of the norm back from weighted to simple Euclidean distance that yields the distribution of ideal points as in Figure 3.

⁷ Nothing limits the argument to the House, of course (see below for a glimpse at Senate data).

⁸ We got the Poole-Rosenthal data off their web site. Jim Snyder provided us with the Heckman-Snyder estimates and other data reported below. We are grateful to all of these scholars.

⁹ Party is strongly related to the first Poole dimension, but consistently if considerably less strongly related to their second dimension. Party is related strongly to the first dimension in Snyder's estimates, and essentially unrelated to any other dimension. We report the strength of these relationships to the two first dimensions as one of our four measures of conditional party government, below.

¹⁰ We weight these by dividing by two times the standard deviation of the distribution of all ideal points in that Congress, as a "standardized" measure, to facilitate comparison across Congresses and between measures. We use two times the standard deviation for scaling purposes (and, of course, corresponding to a range that, if done at the floor median, would effectively encompass about two-thirds of all Members' ideal points).

¹¹ We use the Democratic party because it was the majority party for such a high proportion of these 25 Congresses. Switching to the Republican party when it formed the majority would include the unnecessary complication of differences between the two parties (had we done so, it would have strengthened our assessments, so this was the more conservative choice). We do lose from this measure how very tight the distribution of ideal points of the Republicans was in the 104th (less than half the most cohesive Democratic value for any Congress, and under three-quarters the magnitude of the next most cohesive Republican distribution [the 103rd]).

¹² Put in slightly different terms, the methodological problem is that we observe behavior and assume that it is a function of both preferences and institutions. By at least partially measuring institutional forces, we have taken one significant step towards identifying a still-unidentified equation (as implied in Figure 9).