

# **Information and Leadership Power in the House of Representatives: Information Control as a Leadership Tool<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Are congressional leaders powerful? If so, what is the source of their power? Most congressional scholarship argues that party leaders are either inconsequential, or strongly constrained by the political context or their personality traits. As a result we know very little about what actually comprises congressional leadership. This paper argues that information, and their ability to control it, is an independent source of power for party leaders in the House of Representatives. The typical member of Congress has limited time and resources, and as a result is reliant on leaders to provide information about legislation that is before the chamber. Leaders enjoy numerous staff and resources advantages that enable them to be actively involved in a wide array of issues. Additionally, leaders have an arsenal of tools to limit the availability of information. Using an original dataset of important legislation considered by the House between 2001 and 2008, I find that leaders use information control strategies to lead the legislative process. Specifically, the analyses find that leaders use these strategies in pursuit of their goals—primarily advancing the party’s policy priorities—and in response to the potential for interest group influence. The results suggest that leaders are a more consequential part of the legislative process than most literature suggests.

*A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power.*  
Proverbs 24:5<sup>2</sup>

Within political science, leadership is a poorly understood and understudied concept. Despite decades of interest, we lack an understanding of what factors comprise leadership and what sources of power leaders can rely on to exercise it. As David Truman put it over 50 years ago,

Everyone knows something of leaders and leadership of various sorts, but no one knows very much. Leadership, especially in the political realm, unavoidably or by design often is suffused by an atmosphere of the mystic and the magical, and these mysteries have been little penetrated by systematic observation (p. 94).

This observation remains true today and is especially astute for the study of congressional leadership. Scholarly theories of Congress often focus on leaders and their role in modern policymaking, but these theories tend to emphasize the limits of leadership influence, or stress how strong and weak leadership reflects systematic, and unsystematic, contextual factors (see, for example, Cooper and Brady 1981; Rohde 1991; Krehbiel 1991; Sinclair 2007).

This study provides a theoretical foundation for powerful congressional leadership. Specifically, building off of research conducted by Hall (1987, 1996), Strahan (2007, 2011), and others, information, and the ability of legislative leaders to control it, is identified as an important source of power in the House of Representatives. It is a power that should be understood as broad and diverse. Legislative leaders—both party leaders and committee chairs—can utilize their informational advantages to take the reins of the policymaking process in a number of ways, including restricting access to information, making important decisions in secretive meetings, and providing information-hungry representatives with their own sanitized specifics.

This study, however, focuses specifically on actions taken by party leaders to restrict access to information within the chamber. Perhaps the most common way leaders do this is by

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<sup>2</sup> Translation comes from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*.

limiting the amount of time a bill's text is available for review by members of Congress (MCs) and their staff. In reducing access to this information, leaders make rank-and-file representatives less independently informed and more reliant on leadership-provided information. Using a dataset of important legislation considered by the House between 2001 and 2008, data analyses strongly suggest that leaders use this tactic in support of legislation that addresses party-priority issues and may be subject to substantial interest group influence.

The implications of this study are several. First, it identifies an independent source of leadership power. Second, it introduces several new measures including a measure of layover time, and issue-based measures of party-priority legislation and interest group influence. Finally, advances the perspective advanced by Strahan (2007, 2011) that great insight can be gain from conceptualizing leadership action as goal driven. In sum, this study should serve as a challenge to the conventional standard in the literature that congressional leaders are weak and that their power derives solely from their political environment. Instead, evidence presented here suggests leaders have powerful influence over the policymaking process independent of their principals.

### **Perspectives on Congressional Leadership**

Three perspectives of leadership permeate in congressional scholarship. Typically, leaders are portrayed as either inconsequential, or strongly constrained by the political context or the personality traits they bring to the role. Each of these perspectives describes leaders as weak agents of the congressional rank-and-file.

Krehbiel's (1991) *Information and Legislative Organization*, is the seminal portrayal of leaders as inconsequential to policymaking. By this theory, leaders are delegated procedural authorities to help the chamber overcome collective action problems and ease the passage of legislation. However, leadership action is checked by numerous majority-votes, including the

election of leaders, approving the guidelines for debate as established through special rules, and voting on the final passage of every bill (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1989; Krehbiel 1991, 1999).

What is seen as leadership action is instead portrayed as a manifestation of the preferences of the chamber. Independent leadership action and power is nonexistent and leaders are inconsequential to legislative outcomes.

While other theories disagree with Krehbiel's theory in many respects, they are in harmony in their perceptions of leadership power. Cooper and Brady (1981), paving the way for Aldrich and Rohde's theory of *conditional party government*, argue that the power of legislative leaders is a function of the distribution of preferences within and between the party caucuses. Specifically, the more united the members of a party caucus are with each other, and the more they disagree with the opposing party caucus, the more power and authority they will delegate to their leaders. Thus, leaders only have the authority to act to the degree that their fellow partisans allow them (Rohde 1991; Aldrich and Rohde 2000a, 2000b).

Sinclair's (2007) *Unorthodox Lawmaking* provides a similar perspective of leadership. By demonstrating that the traditional "textbook Congress" gave way to a new "unorthodox" style of lawmaking, she shows how the role of party leaders grew dramatically. However, she argues that leadership activism is driven and restrained by rank-and-file preferences and expectations. The reforms of the 1960s and 1970s reduced the power of committee chairs creating a power vacuum that party leaders filled. As the parties polarized, leaders had to innovate to pass legislation. But this innovation came only in response to clamoring among partisan rank-and-file.

These contextual theories depict leaders that are not independently powerful, and lead only in reaction to the desires of the rank-and-file. Leaders are not viewed as actors with

independent powers to lead. They instead are seen as agents of their followers, acting only where they are explicitly given leeway.

When scholarship has allowed for independent leadership influence, it is generally portrayed as rare and the consequence of a leader's specific personality traits. Follett's (1896) study of the speakership is perhaps the earliest scholarly examination of leadership in Congress. Follett concludes that while the speakership is an inherently powerful office, it takes "men of strong character" such as Henry Clay and Thomas Reed, to use it effectively (Follett 1896, 64). Subsequent studies furthered Follett's hypothesis, analyzing the impact individual leaders such as Clay, Reed, Cannon, and Rayburn had on the House (Fuller 1909; Brown 1922; Hasbrouck 1927; Chiu 1928; Davidson, Hammond, and Smock 1998).

Ripley (1967) concludes that while environmental and institutional factors influence the degree of power leaders wield, the most important factor in leadership power is the individual's propensity to be powerful. This is a sentiment Peters (1997) echoes in his extensive study of the House Speaker. He ultimately finds that, "the contextualist view tends to be insensitive to the major differences that the personal element of the power equation makes" (Peters 1997, 273). Though a historian, Caro's (2002) study of Lyndon Johnson exemplifies this approach to leadership studies. Caro describes Johnson's effectiveness as a Senate leader as a function of his mastery of senatorial politics, the personal relationships he forged with key senators, his physical stature, his fundraising abilities, and to some degree, his good fortune.

Ultimately, these studies remind us that understanding the individual is important to understanding leadership, but they also fail to identify systematic sources or patterns in leadership power. Considered in tandem with scholarship that portrays congressional leaders as beholden to their rank-and-file, we are left with the conclusion that, with the exception of a few

great individuals, leaders are typically weak and have no independent authority or power to lead. Furthermore, these studies provide little understanding of what exactly comprises *leadership* in Congress. The following sections fill in this gap.

### **Information and Power in Congress**

Building on the research of Hall (1987, 1996), Strahan (2007, 2011), and others, this study identifies information as an independent source of leadership power in the congressional policymaking process. This power follows from three defensible foundations:

- (1) Information is a valuable commodity in Congress. Actors with more information are empowered and can play a more central role in the policymaking process.
- (2) There are informational and resource asymmetries in Congress. Certain members, such as party leaders, have more resources and access to more information than the typical member.
- (3) Party leaders in the House have at their disposal numerous procedural powers that enable them to control the flow of information on legislation.

#### ***Information as a Valuable Commodity***

Information is currency in Congress. Before members can debate, amend, or vote on a bill, they have to know what they are debating, amending, and voting on. Unfortunately, most members have limited time and resources with which to be involved in the legislative process. MCs make decisions in a complex environment using imperfect information (Jones 1994, 2001). In order to be successful, legislators have to budget their time strategically. This typically means only becoming deeply involved in policymaking on a handful of issues. For most MCs these are issues relevant to their committee assignments and their constituencies (Hall 1996).

On other issues, unable to be involved themselves, MCs develop shortcuts to information gathering. These shortcuts could be turning to newspapers, interest group materials, or a variety of other sources. However, according to Kingdon (1989, 72-106) a common tactic for MCs is to turn to their colleagues. In order to become informed on a specific bill, they often rely on the

information that can be relayed by trust-worthy fellow members in-the-know. Typically these are senior, fellow partisans who are involved in the bill and have some expertise in the subject.

Through this system of information passing, MCs gain the insight they require to make decisions. However, as a result, members in-the-know are conferred a great deal of power. Those legislators' opinions, and the information they choose to relay about a specific bills or provisions, can have dramatic influence on legislative outcomes. But when it comes to access to information and resources in Congress, all members are not created equal.

### ***Information Asymmetries in the House***

According to Hall (1987, 1996), legislators' levels of involvement on specific bills is related a function of *interest* in the issue, and the *resources* available to commit. Interest can arise from a variety of sources, including the concerns of their constituents and personal policy preferences. Furthermore, interest should be fairly evenly distributed among MCs. Or if it is not, it is the result of some unsystematic factor.

Resources, however, are not equally distributed, and consequently neither is information. Party leaders enjoy far more staff resources than the typical member of Congress. As shown in Table 1, party leadership offices are appropriated millions in additional funds. Furthermore, the disparity between what typical MCs is appropriated for staff resources and what leadership offices are appropriated is growing. Between 1998 and 2010, the amount appropriated to leaders grew by 60 percent while the amount appropriated to the typical MCs grew less than 30 percent.

[ Table 1 about here ]

With more funds at hand, party leaders can hire not only more numerous staff, but typically more experienced and talented staff who can focus more assiduously on fewer issues than the personal staff of rank-and-file representatives. These vast and experienced staff

organizations allow leaders to have their hands in most legislation that is being considered by the House. By comparison, the personal staffers of typical MCs have to work on numerous policy areas and typically have less experience and expertise. Additionally, leaders can fund vast whip organizations that not only collect information about the preferences of the membership of the party caucus, but are often essential in providing information to the rank-and-file about what is in a bill. Altogether, the time restraints and resource disadvantages faced by rank-and-file MCs empower legislative leaders by giving them distinct opportunities for influence.

### ***Leaders' Procedural Powers***

On top of their informational advantages, legislative leaders also have an arsenal of procedural powers—referred to here as information control tactics—which are used to control the flow of information in the chamber, take advantage of the information asymmetries, and lead. These tactics include restricting access to legislative language, bringing bills up for votes on short notice, drafting lengthy and complex legislation, and condensing the legislative agenda so that a torrent of legislation comes up for consideration all at once. Many of these tactics are aimed at further restricting the typical member's access to information and consequently making MCs more reliant on the information supplied by their leaders.

A principal strategy used by party leaders is to reduce the amount of time MCs have to review the language in a bill before it comes up for debate on the floor. Typically, drafts of legislation are not publically posted until after they have been passed by the committee(s) of jurisdiction. House rules state that all bills must then “layover” for three calendar days in which the House is in session before they can be brought up for consideration in the Committee of the Whole (Rybicki 2005). However, this rule is less restrictive for leaders than it sounds and can be easily circumvented. For one, three calendar days does not necessarily mean 72 hours. If a bill

passes committee at 1 a.m. with the House adjourning shortly after and reconvening at 6 a.m. the same morning, one calendar day is considered to have passed.

Furthermore, layover requirements can be overruled via language included in special rules. Most special rules contain language akin to the following:

Resolved, That upon the adoption of this resolution *it shall be in order* to consider in the House the bill (H.R. 3996) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend certain expiring provisions, and for other purposes. *All points of order against consideration of the bill are waived* except those arising under clause 9 or 10 of rule XXI [*emphasis added*].<sup>3</sup>

By declaring the bill in order for consideration and waiving all points of order against its consideration, layover requirements are effectively sidestepped allowing leaders to bring the bill forward without objection at any time.

In fact, many bills are laid over for very short periods of time. Figure 1 shows the distribution of layover times for a sample of 275 important bills considered by the House between 2001 and 2008.<sup>4</sup> To make the graph more readable, bills laid over for more than 1,000 hours (13 bills or 4.8% of the sample) were excluded from the visual presentation. Each bar in the histogram represents a range of 10 hours. Nearly 60 percent of all bills in this sample were laid over for fewer than 72 hours. Perhaps more striking, about 20 percent of bills were laid over for 10 hours or fewer. Given the length and complexity of much of the legislation considered by the House, most MCs would be hard pressed to adequately study and assess an important piece of legislation in less than 10 hours. Consider also that during these hours MCs likely have committee and constituent meetings and other bills to become familiarized with, or that these 10 hours may occur during the night. Altogether, such circumstances demonstrate how members become reliant on other forms of information gathering rather than individual study.

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<sup>3</sup> Language is taken from H. Res. 809 from the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. Clauses 9 and 10 of Rule XXI pertain to points of order relating to congressional earmarks.

<sup>4</sup> The definition of “important” bills is discussed in the Data and Methods section below.

[ Figure 1 about here ]

What makes this leadership control over information even more powerful is the typical member's propensity to go along with party leadership positions. Early scholarship on voting behavior in Congress strongly suggests that most members begin with the assumption that they will support the party position and only deviate from that position when information regarding the bill would make doing so unpalatable (Ripley 1967, 139-59; Matthews and Stimson 1975; Kingdon 1989). As Lee (2009) has more recently suggested, membership in a party caucus provides numerous incentives beyond ideology to go along with the party's positions. These incentives, including the image of the party among the electorate, control over the chamber, and a mistrust of the opposing party, fuel partisanship in Congress and make going along with the party even more enticing to legislators.

Furthermore, MCs want to trust their leaders' judgment. Strong majority leadership aids the passage of legislation over the minority and helps the party build a record of legislative success than can be helpful in subsequent elections (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Jones 2010). An expedited policymaking process reduces the ability of the minority party to script an effective opposition to the majority's legislative platform, aiding its passage. Thus, while majority party members also lose their voice and influence on the details of legislation, they see their general preferences, at least abstractly, advanced. This trade-off keeps the informational arrangement described here intact despite members themselves understanding the negative consequences. For most members of the majority, the positives typically outweigh the obvious negatives.

### **Using Information Control Tactics**

Unfortunately, the influence information control tactics have on the decision making of typical MCs cannot be directly observed. The legislative world cannot be manipulated to see what

outcomes would result from decisions made in perfect and complete information versus restricted information. However, we can observe *when* leaders choose to restrict information. Recent studies of congressional leadership by Strahan (2007, 2011) and Green (2010) argue that we can understand leadership behavior as goal-driven. Thus, if we can identify the goals held by leaders, we can attribute their actions, including those to restrict information, as efforts to obtain these goals. If we can find that information control tactics are used strategically in support of specific goals, we can conclude that leaders, at least, are finding these strategies effective.

Generally, leaders pursue three interrelated goals: (1) remaining in the leadership; (2) winning and holding chamber majorities; and (3) passing the party's policy priorities.<sup>5</sup> In the existing scholarship, the goal of remaining as a leader is by far the most discussed (Cooper and Brady 1981; Krehbiel 1991; Aldrich and Rohde 2000a, 2000b; Sinclair 1995, 2007). Since party leaders are elected to their posts by their principals every two years, they have to satisfy those principals or risk being fired. While congressional history is not exactly replete with cases of leaders being overthrown, the existence of even a few cases—such as Joseph Cannon's (R-IL) removal from power in 1911 and Gerald Ford's (R-MI) defeat of Charles Halleck (R-IN) for Republican leader in 1965—along with the existence of enough ambitious up-and-comers—may be enough to keep leaders on their toes. However, the information and resource advantages leaders enjoy allow them considerable freedom and leeway with their decisions. Typical MCs simply cannot, and would not wish to, check every action their leaders take.

Furthermore, leaders are held responsible not just for being responsive, but also for the electoral successes and failures of the caucus. In other words, performance at the polls is just as

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<sup>5</sup> These three goals reflect the set of leadership goals discussed by Strahan (2007). Green (2010) identifies a broader set of goals. However, some of those goals, including reelection to Congress and representing the institution are of minor importance compared to the three stated here. Green, himself, suggests that leadership in fulfillment of these additional goals is far less common than it is for others.

important for a leader's job security. This is the second leadership goal—helping their party win and hold chamber majorities. All MCs want their party to do well. For the typical member, majority status means more money for district projects (Balla et al 2002; Levitt and Snyder 1995), more institutional power and resources, more campaign cash (Cox and Magar 1999; Rudolph 1999), and a better chance their policy initiatives are adopted. For leaders it means all these things and more. For one, in the minority, leadership powers are diminished. Majority leaders set the agenda and schedule, determine committee seat allocation, influence bill referral, and determine the rules by which legislation is considered. Minority leaders, by contrast, can only respond to majority action. Second, as referenced above, winning and holding chamber majorities aids the job security of leaders. Leaders likely run a much higher risk of attracting opposition if the party is struggling rather than winning electorally (Peabody 1976).

The third leadership goal is passing the party's policy priorities. To some degree, all members of the party caucus hold this goal. All members of a party caucus have an interest in their party passing legislation that creates a positive brand name for the party in the electorate (Cox and McCubbins 2005). In short, if the party is well thought of by voters, everyone benefits. However, the typical MC has many competing interests. For one, the party's collective priorities and the preferences of a representative's constituents may not always align (Kingdon 1989; Sullivan and Uslaner 1978). In these instances members have to consider their district, as well as the party's reputation.

Leaders, however, are subject to additional incentives that promote the advancement of partisan priorities. As such, leaders tend to focus on the big-picture of the legislative process and push major tenets of the party's legislative platform. One set of incentives are the previous two leadership goals. Needing to build a positive party image, leaders typically focus on passable

legislation that achieves the primary aims of the party and helps create a record of success for the party to run on (Cox and McCubbins 2005). Helping to cultivate a positive party image in turn helps leaders stay in power.

Additionally, because of their institutional power, leaders become the primary actors on the president's priority legislation. Because they have to take the lead on the presidential agenda, leaders necessarily have to consider party priorities more than the typical legislator. The president's influence on congressional policymaking is foremost (Bond and Fleisher 1990; Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Edwards and Wood 1999). While not able to dictate policy outcomes, presidents typically have substantial influence over the agenda and the substance of legislation. To a large degree, leaders have to act in response to the presidential agenda. If there is unified government, this means leaders often become the chief supporters of the president's legislation. If there is divided government, it means becoming leaders of the opposition. Modern Speakers of the House, reportedly, feel duty-bound to support the President when he or she is a member of their party (Peters 1997; Green 2010). Peters (1997) also suggests that Speakers feel it is their responsibility to lead the opposition when the president is of the other party.

Leaders are also concerned with their historical reputations. Strahan (2007, 30-33) highlights how Speakers act, in part, to build historical reputations for themselves around the policies passed under their tenure. A concern for reputation naturally lends itself to a concern over big-picture issues. Historically prominent statesmen and stateswomen do not gain national fame by accruing pork. They do so by influencing the enactment of nationally significant legislation. Undoubtedly, this should concern not only Speakers, but other representatives of

significant prominence in the leadership, as well. Like presidents, each of these actors is likely to be concerned with building positive, and national, historical records.<sup>6</sup>

Altogether, these three leadership goals make big-picture, partisan priorities a central concern to leaders more than they are for typical MCs. If information control tactics are effective for leaders, we should expect them to be used more often in support of party priority bills. A testable hypothesis follows:

H1: Leaders will be more likely to restrict access to information on bills that address party priority issues.

There are other factors that may influence the decision to use information control tactics, as well. Leaders know that they are not the only potential source of information. MCs seeking information will look to a variety of sources, including outside interest groups. In this way, lobbying functions as a form of legislative subsidy (Hall and Deardorff 2006). Interest groups seek to form relationships with MCs sympathetic to their goals, providing them with information and additional resources that help balance the disparity with leaders.

For leaders hoping to control the flow of information, these are potentially dangerous arrangements. Interest groups may provide other perspectives and voices on the contents and consequences of a bill that conflict with the leadership's point of view. For some members, interest groups can be more trustworthy sources of information than the leadership. This is especially true among moderate members of a caucus whose policy priorities and preferences often conflict with those of the leadership.

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<sup>6</sup> The desire to develop a reputation could also be the result of a desire to obtain higher political office—the Senate or the even the Presidency. Doing this, however, may incentivize self-interested behavior that is contrary to party goals. Richard Gephardt's (D-MO) support for the 2002 Iraq War Resolution, against the majority of his own caucus, is a prime example. In this instance, Gephardt put his own presidential ambitions ahead of the good of the party, forfeiting the Iraq War as a political issue for the Democrats in the 2004 elections. However, it is important to note that higher political ambitions are not exclusive to leaders within the House. Most MCs likely have some ambitions for higher office. As such it is not viewed here as a distinct leadership goal.

Leaders are likely to respond to the potential for substantial interest group involvement on legislation by further restricting access to information. While some interest groups would likely provide information to support leadership positions, there are a great many groups in the pressure system and it is likely some of them, if not most, will find reasons to object to at least some of a bill's provisions. If leaders want to control the information available about a bill then they will want to keep the bill and its contents out of the hands of interest groups and lobbyists. Some bills have the potential to draw the attention of more organized interests than others. It is on these types of bills that leaders will be most concerned and proactive. A hypothesis follows:

H2: Leaders will be more likely to restrict access to information on bills that are subject to the most potential interest group influence.

The use of information control tactics is also sensitive to the salience of issues among the public. MCs, concerned with their reelection, are going to be more attentive to legislation that addresses topics salient with their constituents. District-specific salience is likely to motivate MCs to try to get involved with the legislation early in the process. As Hall (1996) describes, there is an "intensity bias" in participation in congressional policymaking. MCs who have a particular interest in a bill—often in the interest of their reelection—are more likely to commit time, attention, and resources to that bill from the early committee stages forward.

The national salience of issues is potentially even more important for the use of information control tactics. Widespread salience of a bill or issue changes the time and resources even more members allocate towards the bill. On a vote of some importance that will likely become an issue in the next election, MCs are likely to allocate significant resources to researching and analyzing the bill. With members' interests and concerns primed, leaders will find it more difficult restricting information. In these circumstances, members will remain in tune with the bill as it moves through the stages of the legislative process, and be persistent in

asking questions and demanding answers from committee and party leaders and their staffs. As such, this hypothesis follows:

H3: Leaders will be more likely to restrict access to information on bills that address more salient issues.

### **Data and Methods**

To test the above hypotheses, the analyses here focus on bill layover, or the amount of time a bill's text is available for MCs to read and analyze. As discussed above, restricting layover is principle strategy used by leaders to restrict rank-and-file members' access to information on legislation. The specific dependent variable analyzed is the amount of time, in hours, that elapse between when a bill is reported from committee(s) and brought up for consideration on the floor of the House. To test the impact of covariates on this dependent variable, the best tool is a duration model. In recent years, duration models have become increasingly common in political science and have been used to analyze numerous political phenomena such as congressional retirements (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 1997), and policy adoption and repeal (Berry and Berry 1990; Ragusa 2010). These models are useful for testing layover time as they literally are testing the *duration* that a bill is laid over.

Specifically, I employ a Cox Proportional Hazards model (CPH). The CPH model is a non-parametric duration model. Parametric models are typically used to make predictions about specific durations of individual cases by assuming some general distribution in the data, such as a weibull or log-normal distribution. However, the assumption of an unknown distribution can lead to false inferences (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004). For the purposes of this chapter, I am most interested in understanding the impact of covariates on layover, rather than predicting the layover time of specific bills. The CPH model is best for this because it does not assume any

distribution. The downside is the inability to estimate specific layover times, but the benefit is deriving more accurate estimates of the impacts of the covariates.<sup>7</sup>

Before any tests could be conducted, a sample of bills had to be culled. The sample of bills used here is meant to capture all *important* legislation considered by the House of Representatives between 2001 and 2008. Many minor and trivial bills are considered by Congress each year. Understanding how bills like these are considered is neither important nor interesting. However, understanding how leaders influence the consideration of important legislation tells us something more substantive. In use Sinclair's (2007) method for identifying important legislation. She uses the bills listed in *CQ Weekly's* weekly list of important bills (see, also Taylor 1998). This section has most recently been titled "Bills to Watch", but at times it has also been known as "This Week in Congress", and "What's Ahead". Regardless of name, between 40 and 50 bills are noted annually.

This sample is advantageous, first, because it is inclusive allowing the data analysis to pertain to more legislation than other methods. Second, it is primarily temporal in that it captures legislation that was considered important by actors in the legislative process at the time of consideration. It is this level of importance that drives how leaders act. All regular appropriations bills from each congress were added to the sample, as well. These bills are important simply because they fund every program created by law. Furthermore, they often involve long and contentious battles in the House of Representatives. In all, 275 bills considered between 2001 and 2008 that passed committee and were brought to the floor for consideration were identified.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> CPH models also require that the proportional hazards assumption, which requires that the impacts of covariates on the hazards do not vary over time, is met. There are several tests of this assumption. One prominent test is Harrell's rho test. The results of this test for each covariate and for the model do not reject the null hypothesis that the proportion hazards assumption holds. Schoenfeld, Martingale, and deviance residuals were also plotted and show no signs that the assumption is violated.

<sup>8</sup> Conference reports, house resolutions, and joint resolutions were excluded from the data analyses. Additional analyses were conducted that included conference reports. The results were not substantively different.

To test hypothesis one, an issue-based measure of partisan priority legislation was developed. Coding this measure required that each bill in the sample was first coded for its issue content. Baumgartner and Jones's (2009) issue-typology, which has been made available as part of the Policy Agendas Project, was used.<sup>9</sup> This typology has 19 major issue topics and a total of 225 sub-topics. Using their codebook, each bill in the dataset was coded for the full issue topic (major and sub-topic) it primarily addresses. Second, issues were identified as a party-priority during a congress in two ways. One way was to assess the issue content of bill numbers reserved for the Speaker of the House. Each congress, the first several bill numbers (i.e. H.R.1—H.R.10) are reserved for the Speaker to use as seen fit. The bills inserted into these slots typically represent issues that are important to the Speaker and the party. For each congress, the major issue topic and subtopic of bills inserted into these reserved slots was assessed. Then every bill introduced during that congress that primarily addressed those same topics were coded as a party priority bills.

The other measure of party priority recognizes the president's importance as a partisan leader and as legislator-in-chief. One way to identify the president's agenda is through the issue content of State of the Union addresses. For 2001-2005, the *Policy Agendas Project* coded each sentence in each address for its issue content. Following their coding scheme, the 2006-2008 addresses were similarly coded. For each year, the number of times each issue topic was mentioned during the address was calculated. Each bill was then coded as a presidential priority based on the number of times the issue topic it primarily addresses was mentioned during the speech. Both the 'bill numbering' and 'State of the Union' based measures are used to test hypothesis one. Given that leaders are likely to respond to the president differently during times

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<sup>9</sup> The Policy Agendas Project, its data, and its codebooks can be found at <http://www.policyagendas.org>.

of unified and divided government, for the data analysis this variable is also interacted with a variable for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

To test hypothesis two, a measure of potential interest group influence was developed. The Center for Responsive Politics records the total amount of spending by interest groups representing more than 100 industries each year. These 100 industries were matched to the Policy Agendas Project's 19 major issue topics on the basis of the issues that industry would be most concerned with influencing. Most of the industries were assigned to just one issue topic. However, 30 industries were coded as having a strong interest in two issue topics. The proportion of all interest group spending in a given year by interest groups concerned with each issue topic were then assigned to each bill on the basis of each of the major issue topics it addressed. The resultant values serve as a proxy for the potential influence organized interests concerned with a specific bill could have on the policy process.<sup>10</sup>

To test hypothesis three, a measure of the salience of each bill had to be developed. Scholars have used a number of methods to measure issue salience. One method is to use responses to survey questions asking what they believe to be the nation's "most important problem" (Miller, et al. 1976; Burden and Sanberg 2003). The problem, however, with this measure is that it could bias responses toward issues respondents view negatively. An individual may think an issue is very important, but if they approve of government action and performance on that issue, they may not see it as a "problem" (Wlezien 2005). Other measures have been tried, as well. One method scholars have had some success with is using newspaper articles and editorials to estimate the salience of issues among the public (Epstein and Segal 2000; Binder 1999). Research shows that the public's attention towards political issues is strongly related to

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<sup>10</sup> The Center for Responsive Politics also collects the number of lobbyists employed by each industry. A measure was similarly developed for the number lobbyists associated with each issue topic. Using this measure instead of a spending-based measure did not change the results of the analysis.

the amount of coverage it receives in the news (Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder 1982; Page and Shapiro 1992, 12-13; McCombs 2006). Mayhew (1991) and Binder (1999) both use *New York Times* editorials as a basis for determining the salience of issues, and subsequently, legislation. I similarly rely on *New York Times* editorials.

I used a sample of 10 percent of all editorials that appeared in print in the *Times* between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2008. Each editorial was coded for the full issue topic it most directly addresses. For each year, the number of editorials on each issue topic was summed. This value was then divided by the total number of editorials that contained identifiable issue content creating a measure of issue salience for each issue area for each year.<sup>11</sup> Bills were then assigned a value based on the salience of the issue it primarily addresses.

A number of additional control variables were included in the regression analysis, as well. These variables can be grouped into two general types: procedural factors, and legislation type. Among procedural factors, specifically, there is one important variable: a dichotomous indicator of whether or not the bill was considered under suspension of the rules. Bills considered under suspension pass through the chamber rapidly. For this reason we should expect that this variable to have a strong, negative impact on layover time.

Two control variables deal with the type of legislation. The first is a dichotomous indicator of appropriations bills. Appropriations bills are given a high priority by the leadership every congressional session. These bills fund the entire federal government and can be used to increase or decrease the effectiveness of existing federal programs. Typically, the leadership will bring appropriations bill to the floor more quickly than other legislation. The other variable

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<sup>11</sup> To ensure that the 10 percent sample closely approximated the results of a 100 percent of the editorials, I also coded every editorial for the last six months of 2008 and compared the results to a 10 percent sample of those cases. The values for each issue area were not substantively different between the complete population and the 10 percent sample.

controls for Congress' need to respond quickly to national emergencies. In 2001, Congress was faced with an external shock requiring quick action: the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. A dichotomous variable is included that indicates if the bill was part of the immediate response to the attacks in 2001. These bills should have come to the floor much quicker than the average.

Finally, variables are included to deal with temporal aspects of the data. First, a dichotomous variable is included that indicates if a bill was introduced during the second session of a Congress. Bills introduced during the second session should be more likely to be moved through the legislative process quickly simply because there is less time to get the bill passed. Additionally, dummy variables are included for the 108<sup>th</sup>, 109<sup>th</sup>, and 110<sup>th</sup> congresses to control for the possibility that there are congress-specific patterns in layover times. Furthermore, these variables ensure that the rest of the coefficients are not influenced by congress-specific patterns.

## **Results**

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analysis. The coefficients predict the impact of the covariate on the likelihood of layover ending at any time. A positive coefficient means that an increase in the independent variable increases the likelihood of an abbreviated layover period. The results strongly support hypothesis one. Party priority bills, on average, are significantly more likely to be laid over for shorter periods of time.

[ Table 2 about here ]

Hazard ratios can be calculated from the coefficient estimates. Hazard ratios represent a change in likelihood that an event will occur, or the duration of time being studied will come to an end, given an increase in the independent variable in question. Ratios larger than one indicate an increased likelihood of an abbreviated layover period, while ratios below one indicate a decreased likelihood. Figure 2 presents hazard ratios for the party priority variables interpreted as

changes in likelihood of layover ending. The hazard ratios calculated from the bill numbering measure of party priority bills indicate that party priority legislation is, at any time, 36 percent more likely to have its layover cut short than non-priority legislation. During times of unified government, the model predicts that presidential priority bills are more likely to have short layover times, as well. While the coefficient for presidential priority bills does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, the hazard ratio indicates that a one standard deviation increase in the number of State of the Union mentions increases the likelihood of an abbreviated layover period by 14 percent. These results suggest that legislative leaders restrict access to legislation more often on bills that are party priorities than other legislation.

[ Figure 2 about here ]

The results also suggest that potential interest group influence strongly affects layover. The left side of Figure 3 shows the predicted effect potential interest group spending has on layover time. The model predicts, specifically, that a one standard deviation increase in spending potential results in a 50 percent increase in the likelihood that layover will be cut short. This is a dramatically large effect. It suggests that leaders are very responsive to the potential of interest groups to enter into the policymaking process, upset their information-based power source, and influence the decisions of MCs. Leaders, sensing a threat from these outside groups, take steps to reduce the amount of information available on a bill and keep it out of the hands of the interest groups. This keeps the rank-and-file reliant on leadership-provided information.

[ Figure 3 about here ]

Unlike the measure of party priority of interest group influence, public salience does not significantly impact layover. The coefficients are in the hypothesized direction and the hazard ratio indicates that a one standard deviation increase in the salience of a bill increases the

likelihood of abbreviated layover by 10 percent, however, the impact is not statistically significant and the effect is much smaller than those found for the other explanatory variables. Public salience, apparently, is less of a factor for leadership use of information control tactics than the other factors.

Several of the control variables significantly influenced layover, as well. Appropriations bills have a significantly increased likelihood of being considered after an abbreviated layover period. This reflects the importance that leaders place on the passage of spending bills. Additionally, legislation passed in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks were laid over for far less time than most legislation. This outcome, if nothing else, suggests that Congress can be responsive to the public's perceived demand for action. However, it also may say something about propensity of leaders to take advantage of opportunities. MCs risked great harm to their political careers in opposing any legislation that responded to the attacks. Leaders no doubt knew this to be the case and, similarly, no doubt knew that opposition to such legislation on the basis of procedure—specifically the availability of legislation language—would fall on deaf ears with the American public. In pushing this legislation through the chamber expediently, the leadership advanced preferred legislation—such as the Patriot Act—without allowing for objection on the part of the rank-and-file or the minority party.

Finally, the session in which a bill is considered is important; but the impact is contrary to expectation. Bills introduced during the second session of a congress were significantly *less* likely to have their layover reduced. The expectation was that leaders would be more likely to reduce layover in the second session simply because there was less time to get bills passed before the end of a Congress. Apparently, such a calculus is not used. Instead, layover time tends to be longer during the second session.

Altogether, these results demonstrate that leaders make use of information control tactics to lead the House of Representatives. By restricting access in support of party priority legislation and in keeping information out of the hands of interest groups, leaders act strategically in pursuit of their goals. This strategic goal-oriented action strongly suggests that leaders find these tactics effective and powerful. In this way, information is an important and independent power source for leaders.

### **Conclusions**

Congressional leaders are depicted as weak in much of the existing literature on Congress, to some large degree, because of the difficulty identifying independent sources of leadership power and contextualizing exactly what comprises leadership. This study provides a theoretical foundation and quantitative evidence of a distinct leadership power—information control. Using the resource and informational advantages over typical MCs, leaders can lead the policymaking process when they do choose. In seeking to fulfill their goals, leaders do so in support of party priority legislation. They also do so when their control over information may be threatened by the involvement of outside groups.

Establishing leaders and leadership action as important in congressional policymaking challenges some of the conventional perspectives on Congress and leaders. While leadership is undoubtedly influenced by political context (i.e. Cooper and Brady 1981; Aldrich and Rohde 2000a, 2000b; Sinclair 2007), and the specific officeholder (i.e. Follett 1896; Ripley 1967; Peters 1997, Caro 2002), leadership offices hold their own explicit powers that any leader can utilize. Furthermore, it directly challenges assertions that leaders are inconsequential to the policymaking process (i.e. Krehbiel 1991). Leaders can strongly influence who is involved, and how strongly, in the shaping and deliberating a bill.

This study also introduced several new measures for studying congressional action. No existing congressional scholarship looks at layover times as a dependent variable. Additionally, several measures are developing using the Policy Agendas Project's issue coding, including party and presidential priority indicators for issues and bills, and the potential for interest group influence. The methods used to create these measures should provide a framework for the creation of even more variables that could be used to understand Congress.

Finally, the conclusions culled from this study strongly suggest that future research on congressional action should more explicitly consider the power and influence leaders hold over policymaking. Leaders strongly shape the way bills are written, debated, and passed in the House of Representatives. To ignore their power, or attempt to study congressional policymaking without considering the potential influence of leaders, risks drawing conclusions about Congress that are incomplete or potentially even false.

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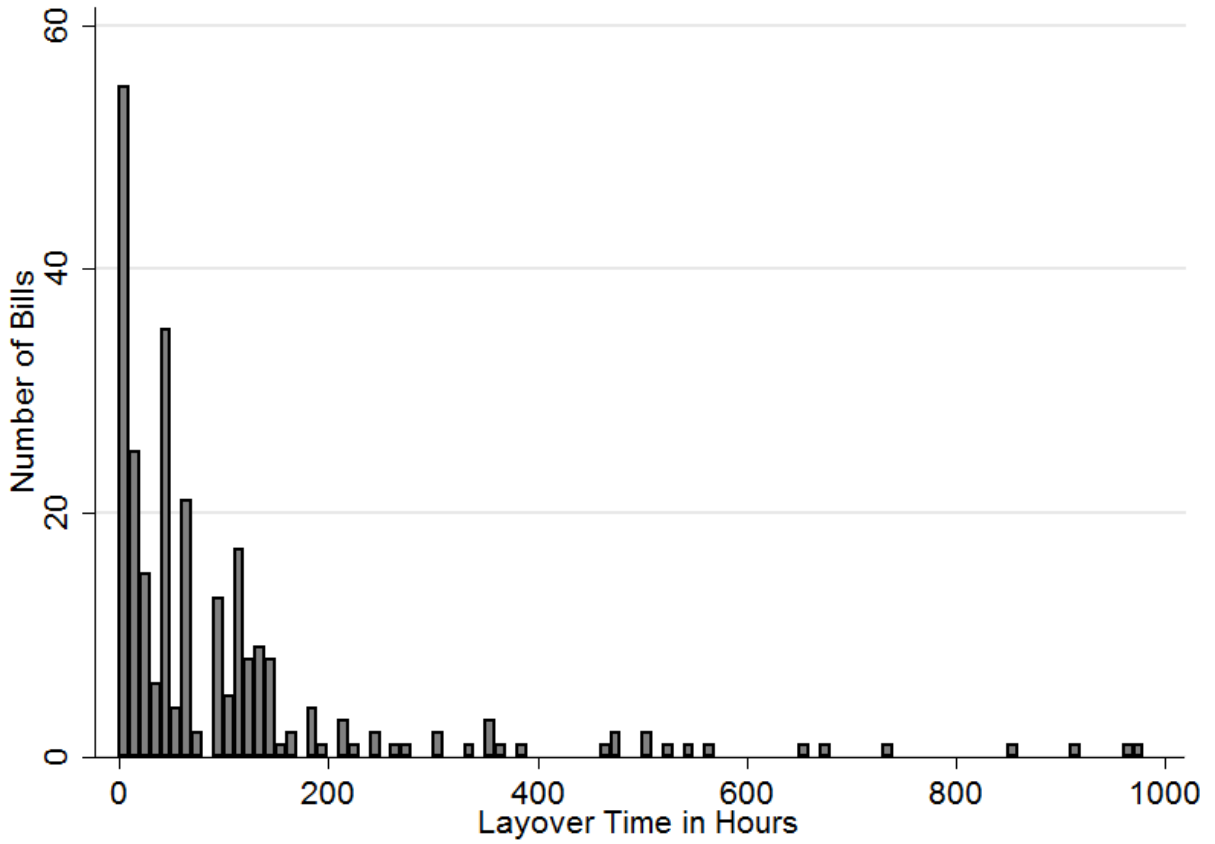
**Table 1: Additional Resources Appropriated to Committees and Party Leadership Offices, 1998-2010 (in 2010 Constant Dollars)**

Fiscal Year	Majority Leadership	Minority Leadership	Committees
2010	\$14,196,000	\$11,685,000	\$171,178,000
2009	\$13,994,544	\$11,544,660	\$188,444,806
2008	\$13,367,143	\$11,001,976	\$167,409,710
2007	\$11,913,704	\$10,280,595	\$159,257,670
2006	\$11,516,032	\$9,959,782	\$155,387,973
2005	\$11,211,646	\$9,654,349	\$155,534,215
2004	\$11,253,088	\$9,700,778	\$152,590,621
2003	\$10,445,272	\$9,155,176	\$151,326,601
2002	\$10,256,428	\$9,038,803	\$154,648,059
2001	\$9,435,490	\$8,277,459	\$138,993,307
2000	\$9,584,881	\$8,409,102	\$145,671,191
1999	\$9,173,691	\$8,004,225	\$142,897,423
1998	\$8,760,583	\$7,693,786	\$139,933,748

*Sources:* Legislative Branch Appropriations, fiscal years 1998-2010.

*Note:* Fund appropriated for majority and minority leadership offices include all funds appropriated for the Speaker's Office, the Majority and Minority Leaders' offices, the Majority and Minority Whips' offices, the Chief Deputy Whips of each party, the Republican Steering Committee, the Republican Conference, the Republican Policy Committee, the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, the Democratic Caucus, "Nine Minority Employees", training and development for each party, and all cloakroom personnel. Funds appropriated to committees include funds for all standing and select committees as well as the Committee on Appropriations. Numbers are displayed in 2010 constant dollars.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Layover Times for Important Legislation, 2001-2008**



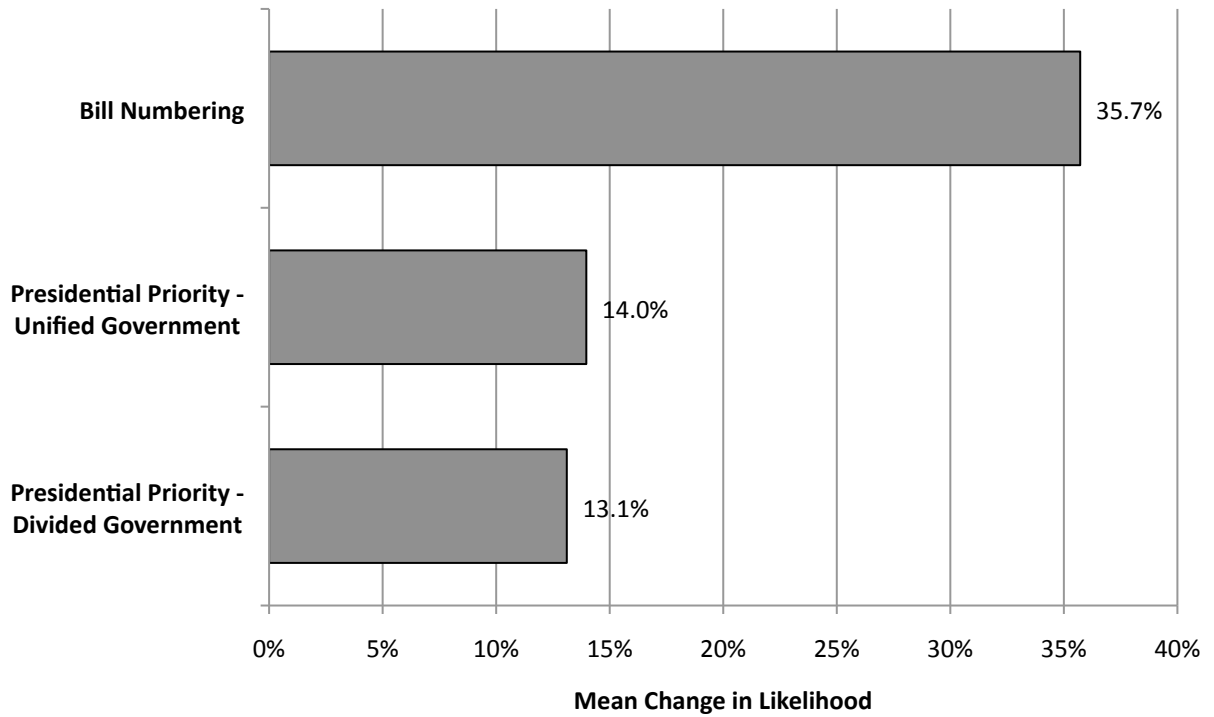
*Note:* Each bar represents 10 hours of layover time. The figure is truncated to exclude the visualization of bills that were laid over for more than 1,000 hours.

**Table 2: Determinants of Reduced Layover Time on Important Legislation, 2001-2008**

	coefficient	std. error	p
<i>Party Priority Bill</i>			
Bill Numbering	0.305	0.208	0.07
Presidential Priority - Unified Gov.	0.013	0.013	0.16
Presidential Priority - Divided Gov.	0.011	0.013	0.20
<i>External Factors</i>			
IG Spending Potential	0.922	0.308	<0.01
Public Salience	-0.031	0.036	0.20
<i>Procedural Factors</i>			
Passed under suspension	0.090	0.282	0.38
<i>Legislation Type</i>			
Appropriations bill	0.337	0.156	0.02
September 11th bill	3.127	0.796	<0.01
<i>Session</i>			
Second session	-0.381	0.149	0.01
<i>Congress</i>			
108th Congress	0.042	0.188	0.82
109th Congress	-0.272	0.191	0.15
110th Congress	-0.081	0.190	0.67
N		268	
AIC		2288	

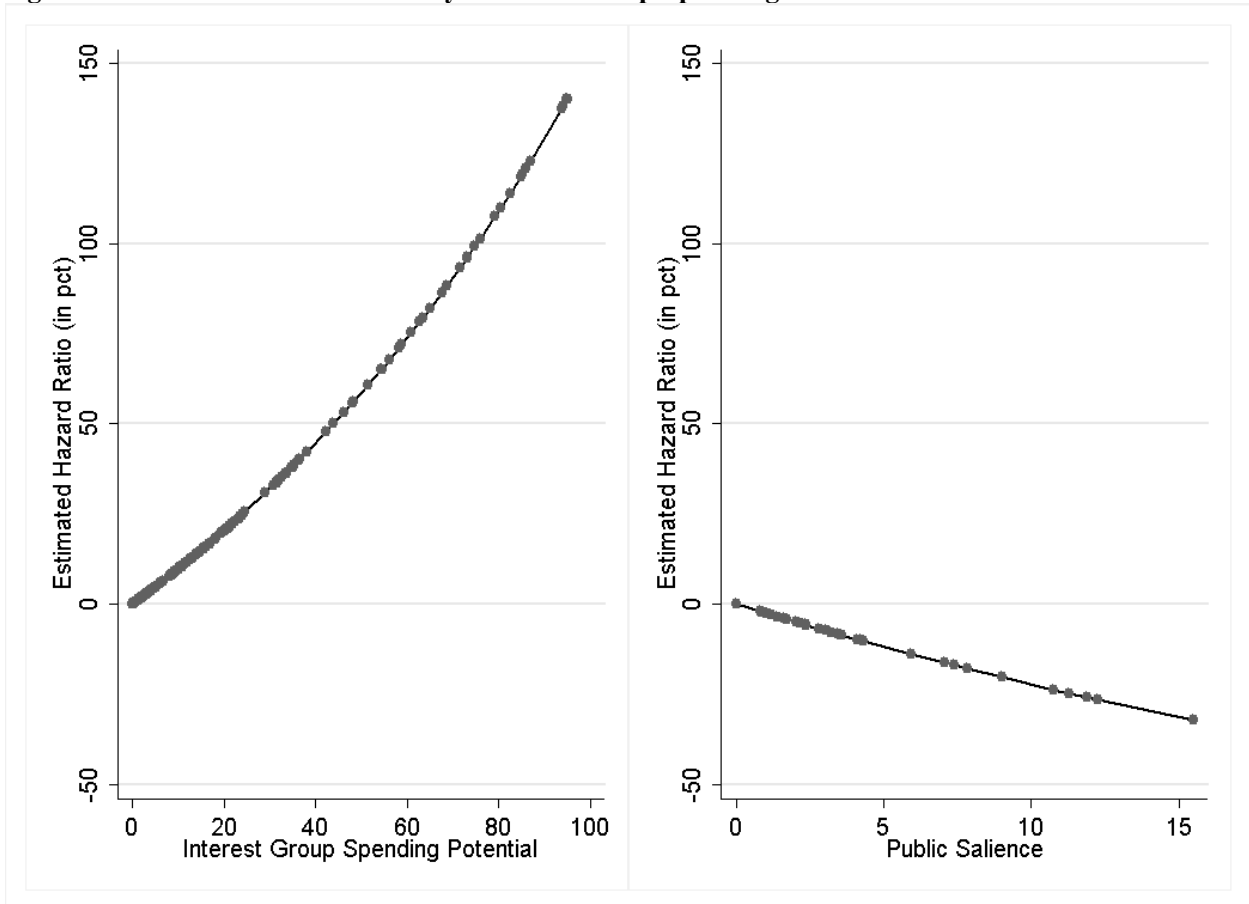
*Note:* Coefficients were fit with a Cox proportional hazards model. Positive coefficients indicate an increased "hazard", or, an increased likelihood of layover ending. P-values are one-tailed for all independent variables except the congress indicators.

**Figure 2: Predicted Hazard Ratio of Party Priority Legislation**



*Note:* Hazard ratios were estimated using the coefficients in Table 2. Values represent the mean increased likelihood of a layover period ending. For the bill numbering variable, the predicted change is calculated as value of the variable changes from 0 to 1. For the presidential priority variables, the predicted change is calculated for a one-standard deviation increase in the value of the variable.

**Figure 3: Predicted Hazard Ratio by Interest Group Spending Potential**



*Note:* Hazard ratios were estimated using the coefficients in Table 2. Values represent the mean change in likelihood of a layover period ending for each value of interest group spending potential and public salience.