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# Congressional Leadership

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## CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

Congressional leadership takes place within an institution that serves two primary functions: making laws and representing citizens. Leaders play essential roles organizing the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate—they set the schedule for debating bills and resolutions; formulate proposals to address public problems; represent their party's priorities through the media and in relations with leaders of the opposing party; support or oppose the president's initiatives in the legislative process; and build coalitions to pass legislation. The main challenge of congressional leadership is to advance the collective interests of the nation or of the leader's political party, while enabling individual members of Congress to represent their constituents. This entry describes the roles and responsibilities of congressional leaders, reviews the relevant theories for explaining congressional leadership, identifies notable congressional leaders in various historical situations, and raises key issues for further study.

### LEADERSHIP POSITIONS: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are two types of formal leadership positions in the United States Congress: party leaders and committee chairs. These types of leaders can be distinguished by their roles and responsibilities, which have varied over time, and by institutional differences between the House and Senate.

#### *Party Leaders in the House of Representatives*

Party leaders hold the most widely recognized positions, and chief among these is Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Speaker is elected by the House of Representatives and is the only House leadership position mentioned in Article I, Section 1 of the Constitution. Though formally recognized as the presiding officer of the House, the Speaker has always been a political figure. After the Civil War, with the solidification of the two-party system, the Speaker's role was geared

more toward serving the interests of the House majority party. In fact, from 1890 to 1910, beginning with Thomas B. Reed (R-ME) and ending with Joe Cannon (R-IL), the Speaker of the House developed into perhaps the most powerful leadership position in government. During that period, the Speaker had various formal means of leading the House, including making committee appointments, controlling the legislative schedule, recognizing members who wished to make motions or address the House during floor debate, and overruling delay tactics by the minority party. Over time those powers eroded, but the House witnessed a resurgence of the Speaker's office beginning with the speakership of Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill (1977–1986). Today the Speaker plays a major role in appointing members of the majority party to committees, controlling the legislative agenda through the House Rules Committee, articulating the priorities of the majority party through the media, raising money for the party and its candidates, and negotiating the terms of major legislation with Senate leaders and the President.

The majority party selects a floor leader, whip, and conference chair, each of whom performs various roles and, combined with the Speaker, constitute a leadership team. These leadership positions emerged after 1910, when the House voted to restrict the power of the Speaker after a majority of members agreed that Speaker Joe Cannon (R-IL) had abused the powers of the office. The majority leader, sometimes referred to as the Speaker's main lieutenant, is primarily responsible for scheduling legislation and managing business on the House floor. Next in line is the majority whip, who takes "whip counts" (polls of party members to determine support for major bills) and persuades wayward members to support the leadership's position. The majority whip appoints a chief deputy whip to assist the whip in managing a large network of deputy and regional whips, selected members of the party who help to conduct whip counts. While Congress is in session, the majority whip holds weekly meetings where members voice their support for, or raise concerns about, bills about to come to the House floor. Finally, the party's conference, or caucus, chair

(Republicans refer to their party organization as a “conference,” while Democrats call theirs a “caucus”) is mainly responsible for formulating and disseminating the party’s message.

Taken together, the majority party leadership team seeks to advance the majority party’s policy agenda and political goals, especially maintaining majority control of the House. Toward these ends, party leaders decide which legislation goes from committee to the House floor, organize meetings of key members, communicate frequently with members, mediate differences between members or between committees, raise money for the party, solve problems with pending legislation that may endanger a member’s chances for reelection or unduly compromise the members’ position on policy issues, and speak on behalf of the party to reporters and interested organizations.

Notwithstanding the Speaker who, by default, is the leader of the majority party, the House minority party’s leadership structure mirrors that of the majority party. The minority party elects a minority leader, minority whip, and a conference (or caucus) chair. The roles of the minority whip and conference (or caucus) chair are similar to their counterparts in the majority. Like the majority leader, the minority leader manages the floor for the minority party, but unlike the majority leader, the minority leader has virtually no role in scheduling legislation. The minority leader is the *de facto* “opposition party leader,” the primary spokesperson and representative for the House minority party. Since minority leaders have almost no formal authority to influence the policy agenda, they must choose from among three general strategies of leadership: (1) cooperate with the majority party leadership and seek compromises consistent with the policy goals of the minority party; (2) split the majority party on specific issues in order to build a coalition of the minority party and a faction of the majority party; or (3) combat the majority leadership and attempt to obstruct the majority party’s agenda. At the outset of the 108th Congress (2003–2004), the Democrats elected Nancy Pelosi of California to be minority leader, making her the first woman in history to serve as a floor leader for either party in Congress.



*Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House of Representatives and one of the most powerful men in the United States, speaks with President John F. Kennedy in Austin, Texas in November 1960.*

Source: Bettmann/Corbis; used with permission.

### *Committee Leaders in the House of Representatives*

Much of the legislative work of Congress is done in committees and subcommittees. After a bill is introduced, it is assigned to a standing committee where, in most cases, its fate is decided. The bill can be ignored, but if it’s given a hearing, it may be debated, marked up, and amended in committee prior to being scheduled for action by the whole House. Thus, committee and subcommittee chairs in the House of Representatives, who are always members of the majority party, also perform important leadership roles. The main responsibilities of a committee chair is to organize the committee’s legislative agenda, formulate policy proposals, build coalitions among committee members, advocate for the committee’s bills when they go to the House floor, negotiate policy details with Senate leaders and executive branch officials, and represent the House position in conferences with the Senate. The House committee system offers a plentiful number of committee leadership positions; in the 108th Congress (2003–2004), there are nineteen standing committees and ninety-two subcommittees, each led by a chair.

### *Senate Leadership*

The Constitution (Article I, Section 3) gives the Vice President a formal role as “President of the Senate,” and identifies a “President pro tempore” to preside in the absence of the Vice President. But neither of these two positions has been conducive to strong institutional or party leadership. Unlike the House, which has always had a Speaker, the Senate did not develop a structure for party leadership until the end of the nineteenth century. Prior to that time, individual senators occasionally performed leadership roles by taking strong positions on major issues or fashioning compromises in order to pass legislation. Floor leaders for the parties emerged in the 1880s from the party caucuses and policy committees that developed after the Civil War. Yet neither party formally elected floor leaders until 1913, when the Democrats elected John Kern of Indiana as the first majority leader.

Today the Senate is led by various party leaders (floor leaders, whips, and conference chairs) and standing committee and subcommittee chairs, who perform some of the same roles as those in the House. The parties have developed somewhat different structures. Writing in the 1950s, political scientist Donald R. Matthews observed that the Democrats have more “personalized, informal, centralized” leadership, whereas Republican leadership is more “formalized, institutionalized and decentralized” (1960, 123–124). Thus, the Democratic floor leader also chaired the party conference and the steering and policy committee, whereas Republicans divided responsibilities for these positions among several senators. This distinction has blurred since that time, though Republicans still offer a broader range of leadership opportunities than Democrats. The key party leaders in the Senate, the majority and minority leaders, organize their respective parties, negotiate the legislative schedule, and serve as the chief spokespersons for their parties. Committee chairs carry out tasks similar to those of their counterparts in the House. As in the House, Senate committee and subcommittee chairs are members of the majority party, and thus the majority party leaders and committee chairs have influence over the legislative agenda.

Yet the legislative process in the Senate is very different from the House process, and the differences affect the roles and responsibilities of party leaders. The Senate has nothing comparable to a Speaker of the House; it has no Rules Committee to determine the length of debate and number of amendments to bills that go to the floor; it has no rules that require amendments to be germane to the legislation before it; and it grants rights to individual members and to the minority. Whereas the majority party leadership in the House can virtually dictate the floor schedule through the Rules Committee, the Senate operates on the basis of unanimous consent agreements. Thus, the majority party dominates House procedures, but a single senator can block progress by putting a hold on a bill, and a single senator can offer amendments that are not germane to bills under consideration on the Senate floor. A minority of senators can conduct a filibuster (an endless debate on a bill or a resolution), and it takes sixty votes, more than half of the hundred senators, to end a debate and enable the Senate to vote on the final passage of a bill or a resolution. Though the Senate majority leader enjoys the right of first recognition on the floor, he is rarely in a position to control the agenda. The major role of the Senate majority leader is to negotiate with the minority leader to develop daily floor schedules and accommodate the wishes of individual senators.

Whereas the size and rules of the Senate limit the roles of party leaders, they create leadership opportunities for virtually every senator. In the 108th Congress, there are twenty committees and sixty-eight subcommittees in the Senate, enough positions for all senators of the majority party to chair at least one committee or subcommittee. Moreover, rules that grant individual senators leverage in the legislative process enable *all* senators, even those in the minority party, to pursue informal leadership roles. Personal motivations to achieve policy goals, regular opportunities to appear on television, large staffs that can conduct policy analysis, an expansive number of interest groups seeking elected officials to advance their causes, and the regular chance to offer floor amendments give senators incentives to exercise leadership on multiple issues. In a notable recent

example of informal leadership, John McCain (R-AZ) and Russ Feingold (D-WI) successfully championed campaign finance reform.

## THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

In addition to describing the leadership roles, political scientists have sought to explain leadership styles, strategies, and strengths. Some theories of leadership are based on political concepts, institutional features of Congress, and situational forces that affect the legislature and the legislative agenda. Other political scientists have applied theories developed in economics to explain leadership. The various theories explain leadership selection; limitations on strong leadership in a representative body; the relationship between leaders and members; the conditions that are most conducive to centralized party leadership and which are most likely to favor decentralized, committee leadership; and the role of individual qualities in explaining leadership style. Most theories are based on House leadership, though there are several important studies of Senate leadership.

### *Contextual Theory*

Political scientists have stressed the importance of “contextual” factors, referring to the key conditions or the situations that affect leadership behavior. Among the most significant contextual factors are the importance individual members put on representation, the degree of party unity, the policy agenda, and the formal powers of the leader’s office. One of the most influential studies of House leadership, which was done by political scientist Charles O. Jones in 1969, illustrates the limits of centralized leadership in a representative body by describing how a majority of members revolted against Speaker Joe Cannon (R-IL) in 1910. Accusing Cannon of autocracy, a coalition of progressive Republicans and minority party Democrats voted to remove the Speaker from the Rules Committee, expand the size of the Committee, and require that Committee members be elected by the House rather than appointed by the Speaker. Jones argues that leaders must be responsive to the expectations of the elected mem-



## Four Rules of Leadership in a Free Legislative Body

First, no matter how hard-fought the issue, never get personal.

Second, do your homework. You can’t lead without knowing what you are talking about.

Third, the American Legislative process is one of give and take. Use your power as a leader to persuade, not intimidate.

Fourth, be considerate of the needs of your colleagues, even if they are at the bottom of the totem pole.

—George H. W. Bush

bers or they will ultimately be sanctioned by the members.

Scholars who apply “principal-agent” theories, derived from organizational economics, to study leadership have adopted the premise that leaders must respond to member expectations. Using the principal-agent model, leaders (agents) have incentives to accommodate the policy preferences and expectations of their followers (principals). Some argue that followers will repudiate and/or sanction leaders who repeatedly ignore their wishes, whereas others suggest that leaders have some leverage to take risks or even pursue strategies to coerce the followers without fear of being removed or rebuked.

Whereas Jones sought to explain the limits on power, others seek to explain why Speakers might be granted extensive powers at certain times and how that affects leadership style. One of the key conditions defining leadership style and strength is the degree of party unity among party members, measured in terms of their agreement on policy preferences. In 1981 political scientists Joseph Cooper and David W. Brady argued that when party unity is high, members are more likely to encourage and tolerate strong party leadership; when party unity is low, members seek to distribute power away from a central leadership position. Thus, the centralized, hierarchical leadership style of Thomas B. Reed (R-ME), who served two times as Speaker (from 1889–1891

(text continued on p. 266)

## Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives

<i>Congress</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Date Elected</i>
1st	Frederick A.C. Muhlenberg	Pennsylvania	Apr. 1, 1789
2nd	Jonathan Trumbull	Connecticut	Oct. 24, 1791
3rd	Frederick A.C. Muhlenberg	Pennsylvania	Dec. 2, 1793
4th	Jonathan Dayton	New Jersey	Dec. 7, 1795
5th	Jonathan Dayton	New Jersey	May 15, 1797
6th	Theodore Sedgwick	Massachusetts	Dec. 2, 1799
7th	Nathaniel Macon	North Carolina	Dec. 7, 1801
8th	Nathaniel Macon	North Carolina	Oct. 17, 1803
9th	Nathaniel Macon	North Carolina	Dec. 2, 1805
10th	Joseph B. Varnum	Massachusetts	Oct. 26, 1807
11th	Joseph B. Varnum	Massachusetts	May 22, 1809
12th	Henry Clay	Kentucky	Nov. 4, 1811
13th	Henry Clay	Kentucky	Jan. 19, 1814
14th	Henry Clay	Kentucky	Dec. 4, 1815
15th	Henry Clay	Kentucky	Dec. 1, 1817
16th	Henry Clay	Kentucky	Dec. 6, 1819
16th	John W. Taylor	New York	Nov. 15, 1820
17th	Philip P. Barbour	Virginia	Dec. 4, 1821
18th	Henry Clay	Kentucky	Dec. 1, 1823
19th	John W. Taylor	New York	Dec. 5, 1825
20th	Andrew Stevenson	Virginia	Dec. 3, 1827
21st	Andrew Stevenson	Virginia	Dec. 7, 1829
22nd	Andrew Stevenson	Virginia	Dec. 5, 1831
23rd	John Bell	Tennessee	June 2, 1834
24th	James K. Polk	Tennessee	Dec. 7, 1835
25th	James K. Polk	Tennessee	Sept. 4, 1837
26th	Robert M.T. Hunter	Virginia	Dec. 16, 1839
27th	John White	Kentucky	May 31, 1841
28th	John W. Jones	Virginia	Dec. 4, 1843
29th	John W. Davis	Indiana	Dec. 1, 1845
30th	Robert C. Winthrop	Massachusetts	Dec. 6, 1847
31st	Howell Cobb	Georgia	Dec. 22, 1849
32nd	Linn Boyd	Kentucky	Dec. 1, 1851
33rd	Linn Boyd	Kentucky	Dec. 5, 1853
34th	Nathaniel P. Banks	Massachusetts	Feb. 2, 1856
35th	James L. Orr	South Carolina	Dec. 7, 1857
36th	William Pennington	New Jersey	Feb. 1, 1860
37th	Galusha A. Grow	Pennsylvania	July 4, 1861
38th	Schuyler Colfax	Indiana	Dec. 7, 1863
39th	Schuyler Colfax	Indiana	Dec. 4, 1865
40th	Schuyler Colfax	Indiana	Mar. 3, 1867
40th	Theodore M. Pomeroy	New York	Mar. 4, 1869
41st	James G. Blaine	Maine	Mar. 4, 1869
42nd	James G. Blaine	Maine	Mar. 4, 1871
43rd	James G. Blaine	Maine	Dec. 1, 1873
44th	Michael C. Kerr	Indiana	Dec. 6, 1875
44th	Samuel J. Randall	Pennsylvania	Dec. 4, 1876
45th	Samuel J. Randall	Pennsylvania	Dec. 4, 1876
46th	Samuel J. Randall	Pennsylvania	Mar. 18, 1879
47th	J. Warren Keifer	Ohio	Dec. 5, 1881
48th	John G. Carlisle	Kentucky	Dec. 3, 1883
49th	John G. Carlisle	Kentucky	Dec. 7, 1885
50th	John G. Carlisle	Kentucky	Dec. 5, 1887
51st	Thomas B. Reed	Maine	Dec. 2, 1889
52nd	Charles F. Crisp	Georgia	Dec. 8, 1891
53rd	Charles F. Crisp	Georgia	Aug. 7, 1893
54th	Thomas B. Reed	Maine	Dec. 2, 1895
55th	Thomas B. Reed	Maine	Mar. 15, 1897

## Speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives (continued)

<i>Congress</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Date Elected</i>
56th	David B. Henderson	Iowa	Dec. 4, 1899
57th	David B. Henderson	Iowa	Dec. 2, 1901
58th	Joseph G. Cannon	Illinois	Nov. 9, 1903
59th	Joseph G. Cannon	Illinois	Dec. 4, 1905
60th	Joseph G. Cannon	Illinois	Dec. 2, 1907
61st	Joseph G. Cannon	Illinois	Mar. 15, 1909
62nd	James Beauchamp Clark	Missouri	Apr. 4, 1911
63rd	James Beauchamp Clark	Missouri	Apr. 7, 1913
64th	James Beauchamp Clark	Missouri	Dec. 6, 1915
65th	James Beauchamp Clark	Missouri	Apr. 2, 1917
66th	Frederick H. Gillett	Massachusetts	May 19, 1919
67th	Frederick H. Gillett	Massachusetts	Apr. 11, 1921
68th	Frederick H. Gillett	Massachusetts	Dec. 3, 1923
69th	Nicholas Longworth	Ohio	Dec. 7, 1925
70th	Nicholas Longworth	Ohio	Dec. 5, 1927
71st	Nicholas Longworth	Ohio	Apr. 15, 1929
72nd	John N. Garner	Texas	Dec. 7, 1931
73rd	Henry T. Rainey	Illinois	Mar. 9, 1933
74th	Joseph W. Byrns	Tennessee	Jan. 3, 1935
74th	William B. Bankhead	Alabama	Jun. 4, 1936
75th	William B. Bankhead	Alabama	Jan. 5, 1937
76th	William B. Bankhead	Alabama	Jan. 3, 1939
76th	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Sept. 16, 1940
77th	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 3, 1941
78th	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 6, 1943
79th	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 3, 1945
80th	Joseph W. Martin, Jr.	Massachusetts	Jan. 3, 1947
81st	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 3, 1949
82nd	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 3, 1951
83rd	Joseph W. Martin, Jr.	Massachusetts	Jan. 3, 1953
84th	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 5, 1955
85th	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 3, 1957
86th	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 7, 1959
87th	Sam Rayburn	Texas	Jan. 3, 1961
87th	John W. McCormack	Massachusetts	Jan. 10, 1962
88th	John W. McCormack	Massachusetts	Jan. 9, 1963
89th	John W. McCormack	Massachusetts	Jan. 4, 1965
90th	John W. McCormack	Massachusetts	Jan. 10, 1967
91st	John W. McCormack	Massachusetts	Jan. 3, 1969
92nd	Carl B. Albert	Oklahoma	Jan. 21, 1971
93rd	Carl B. Albert	Oklahoma	Jan. 3, 1973
94th	Carl B. Albert	Oklahoma	Jan. 14, 1975
95th	Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.	Massachusetts	Jan. 4, 1977
96th	Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.	Massachusetts	Jan. 15, 1979
97th	Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.	Massachusetts	Jan. 5, 1981
98th	Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.	Massachusetts	Jan. 3, 1983
99th	Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.	Massachusetts	Jan. 3, 1985
100th	James C. Wright, Jr.	Texas	Jan. 6, 1987
101st	James C. Wright, Jr.	Texas	Jan. 3, 1989
101st	Thomas S. Foley	Washington	Jun. 6, 1989
102nd	Thomas S. Foley	Washington	Jan. 3, 1991
103rd	Thomas S. Foley	Washington	Jan. 5, 1993
104th	Newt Gingrich	Georgia	Jan. 4, 1995
105th	Newt Gingrich	Georgia	Jan. 7, 1997
106th	J. Dennis Hastert	Illinois	Jan. 6, 1999
107th	J. Dennis Hastert	Illinois	Jan. 3, 2001
108th	J. Dennis Hastert	Illinois	Jan. 7, 2003

and 1895–1899) during the period of “czar speakers” (from 1890–1910), was based on the high levels of agreement on policy goals among party members. The Speaker chaired a Rules Committee with only five members; appointed members to committees; had the power to recognize members from the floor; and blocked attempts by the minority party to obstruct legislative business. The so-called “Reed rules” allowed the Speaker to count all present members as part of quorum, limit quorums to one hundred members, and ignore motions from members designed to delay the process. Republican members viewed a powerful Speaker as the way to advance the party’s national agenda of economic expansion, a goal they all shared, rather than a hindrance on their ability to represent their particular constituencies.

Cooper and Brady observed that a high degree of party unity among the members is derived from the policy preferences of the members’ voting constituencies. In simple terms, if voters in different congressional districts share similar views and elect members from the same party to represent those views, then the elected representatives of those parties will also hold similar policy preferences. Thus, when individual members agree on the direction of the party, they are more willing to cede power to a central leader who can use that power to advance the individual and collective goals of party members. On the other hand, when members of the party represent diverse constituencies and hold different policy preferences, they are less likely to vest power in the hands of a central leader, and power is decentralized among committee chairs or individual members. In this situation, the speakers must be skilled at bargaining with the factions within the party and among committee chairs who have considerable power in their own right. As Cooper and Brady illustrate, Speaker Sam Rayburn (D-TX), who served as Speaker on three different occasions (1941–1947, 1949–1952, and 1955–1961), mastered this style of leadership.

Scholars have noted that increases in internal party unity and interparty conflict over key issues, as well as other institutional and policy conditions, explain a resurgence in the speakership since the

1980s. In 1995 political scientists Barbara Sinclair argued that in addition to the degree of party unity, reforms passed in the 1970s that strengthened the Speaker’s role in making committee appointments and referring legislation, divided government, and budget deficits created renewed expectations for strong party leadership. Those conditions encouraged members to give leaders the resources to solve problems and capitalize on opportunities.

### *Context and Individual Leadership Styles*

Several theories of House party leadership have argued that leadership is a function of both the context within which leaders are operating and the individual qualities of the leaders. One concept of “conditional party leadership” refines contextual theories by arguing that the strength of party leadership depends on both the context and the style of individual leaders. When the majority party is internally unified and its positions are strongly opposed by the minority party, the conditions favor strong party leadership. But the strength of party leadership also depends on an individual leader’s qualities; aggressive leaders are more likely to use the powers granted to them by the members. Theories that explain committee leadership also tend to rely on a combination of contextual and individual factors.

### *Senate Leadership*

Theories of Senate leadership also focus on institutional and political conditions, though scholars agree that personal factors are very important. In 1969 political scientist Randall Ripley developed three types of power distribution that affect Senate leadership: centralized, decentralized, and individualism. Conditions that centralize power give party leaders critical roles in managing the legislative agenda; decentralized power structures distribute leadership opportunities among committee chairs; and individualism further weakens party leadership and extends leadership opportunities to subcommittees and individual senators.

Though all three models have been at work at different times in history, given the norms and rules of the Senate, the center of gravity is toward individualism.



This was certainly true during most of the nineteenth century. As Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts remarked: “This is a Senate, a Senate of equals, of men of individual honor and personal character, and of absolute independence. We know no masters, we acknowledge no dictators” (Quoted in Peabody, 1981, 64). Thus, in the 1830s and 1840s, talented individuals like Webster, Henry Clay of Kentucky, and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina led Senate debate on major issues related to slavery and state rights.

A form of centralized party leadership emerged in the Senate at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century during the heyday of the two-party system. The Senate developed party caucuses and policy committees to represent the collective interests of the parties after the Civil War. Yet, as a testament to the importance of personal qualities and informal leadership in the Senate, “centralized party leadership” developed mainly through the will of two men, William Allison (R-IA), Chair of the Appropriations Committee, and Nelson Aldrich (R-RI), Chair of the Finance Committee. Allison (served in the Senate from 1872 to 1908) and Aldrich (served in the Senate from 1881 to 1911), with Aldrich playing the major role, emerged as de facto leaders of the Senate Republican Party from 1890 to 1910. The two men formed a leadership team that included Orville Platt (R-CT) (served in the Senate from 1879 to 1905) and John Spooner (R-WI) (served in the Senate from 1897 to 1907), which directed the legislative business of the Senate. The formal position of majority floor leader was not created until after Aldrich left office in 1910.

Another important period of strong Senate party leadership emerged with Lyndon Johnson, Democratic majority leader from 1955 to 1960. In 1961 political scientist Ralph K. Huitt explained how Johnson used his personal talents, and the few powers available to him as majority leader, to advance legislation through the Senate. Johnson was a pragmatist and an expert at parliamentary procedures, and he was tenacious in seeking votes to pass legislation. He used his position as chair of the steering committee to see to it that every Democratic senator, including freshmen, was appointed to an important committee. He gathered extensive knowledge of each senator’s priorities

## U.S. Senate Majority Leaders

<i>Majority Leader</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Congress</i>
Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA)	1920–1925	66–68
Charles Curtis (R-KS)	1925–1929	68–70
James E. Watson (R-IN)	1929–1933	70–72
Joseph T. Robinson (D-AR)	1933–1937	73–75
Alban W. Barkley (D-KY)	1937–1947	75–79
Wallace H. White Jr. (R-ME)	1947–1949	80
Scott W. Lucas (D-IL)	1949–1951	81
Ernest W. McFarland (D-AZ)	1951–1953	82
Robert A. Taft (R-OH)	1953	83
William H. Knowland (R-CA)	1953–1955	83
Lyndon B. Johnson (D-TX)	1955–1961	84–86
Mike Mansfield (D-MT)	1961–1977	87–94
Robert C. Byrd (D-WV)	1977–1981	95–96
Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-TN)	1981–1985	97–98
Robert Dole (R-KS)	1985–1987	99
Robert C. Byrd (D-WV)	1987–1989	100
George J. Mitchell (D-ME)	1989–1995	101–103
Robert Dole (R-KS)	1995–1996	104
Trent Lott (R-MS)	1996–2001	104–107
Thomas A. Daschle (D-SD)	2001–2003	107
Trent Lott (R-MS)	2001–2002	107
Bill Frist (R-TN)	2003–	108

and used that knowledge when it came time to lobby them. Johnson was famous for giving individual members the “treatment,” a one-on-one session where he appealed to them by cajoling, educating, persuading, and, if necessary, threatening them to get their attention and support. Johnson used the position of majority leader like none before or since to move legislation through a highly fragmented and individualized institution.

## KEY CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS

Many leaders have played prominent roles in shaping the institutions of the House and Senate, setting the policy agenda and advancing legislation through the Congress. Following is a short list of the most important congressional leaders:

Henry Clay of Kentucky was elected Speaker of the House three times and served a total of ten years (1811–1814, 1815–1820, and 1823–1825). Clay was a popular and effective politician during the formative years of the House of Representatives. He was

the first Speaker to be elected to advance a policy agenda, and he played a key role in the development of the committee system.

Thomas B. Reed, Republican of Maine, was Speaker of the House during a period of strong party government (1889–1891 and 1895–1899) and is regarded as the most powerful Speaker in history.

Sam Rayburn, Democrat of Texas, was the longest-serving Speaker of the House in history (1941–1947, 1949–1952, and 1955–1961). Rayburn developed a system of informal gathering called the “Board of Education” in which he gathered information and discussed House business with powerful committee chairs over whiskey and branch water. As noted above, his bargaining skills were outstanding.

Lyndon Johnson served as minority leader (1953–1955) and majority leader (1955–1961) in the United States Senate. By his forceful personality, Johnson is responsible for turning the majority leader’s office into a powerful position. Johnson instituted the “Johnson rule” whereby freshman senators are given prize committee appointments. He is also famous for the “Johnson treatment”.

Newt Gingrich, Republican of Georgia, Speaker of the House from 1995 to 1998, is principally responsible for returning the Republican Party to the majority after forty years as a minority party. Gingrich used effective organizational skills to raise money and recruit Republican candidates and aggressive tactics to criticize Democratic leaders and liberal policies. His movement to overturn the Democratic majority culminated in the “Contract with America,” a ten-point agenda of policy initiatives that formed the basis of the 1994 congressional elections, when the Republicans won a majority. Gingrich’s effort to transform the role of government through the budget process was ultimately stymied by President William Clinton in 1995 and 1996, and he later resigned from Congress after the Republicans lost seats in the 1998 midterm elections.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Though many areas of congressional leadership are ripe for further research, a few deserve urgent atten-

tion. First, now that the Republicans have held control of the House for at least ten consecutive years, there is sufficient information to study the effects of party on House leadership. Most recent accounts of congressional leadership are derived from observations of Democratic leaders; we may now consider whether and why Republican leaders behave differently and what difference it makes. Second, since we know that conditions affect leadership, we should consider whether and how the increased use of technology affects leadership in the House and Senate. Finally, at a time of intense two-party competition, scholars should explore more carefully how the size of the majority affects leadership, especially in the Senate. These questions and others will continue to occupy scholars interested in congressional leadership.

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*See also* Civil Rights Act of 1964; Johnson, Lyndon

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