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Xiaoli Jin

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Party Loyalty and Committee Assignment in the U.S. House of Representatives

Cover Page Footnote

Xiaoli Jin holds a B.A. from Middlebury College in Computer Science and Political Science, and has received early admission to Harvard Law School.

Party Loyalty and Committee Assignment in the U.S. House of Representatives

House committee assignment has long been a widely-discussed topic in academic research due to its strategic legislative importance. A place where most bills are formulated, House committees cultivate members' legislative expertise on policy areas key to the interests of the country. One question often ignites debate among political scientists: By which criteria are committee assignments allocated?

By the theory of self-selection, the primary principle of allocation is to ratify member's preferences. Proponents of this theory argue that it benefits the party to accommodate member's requests. Members usually request committees that are directly related to their constituencies. Accordingly, if members can serve on committees they request, they will be able to secure more preferential treatments for their constituents. Hence their constituents will be more likely to reelect them, maximizing their party's advantage over other parties. Professor Irwin Gertzog of Allegheny College is one of the most prominent scholars who supports this theory of self-selection. In his article, *The Routinization of Committee Assignment in the U.S. House of Representatives*, he emphasizes the high proportion of members who got their first-choice assignments within a few terms arriving in Congress. He interprets this as evidence that the assignment process was largely nondiscretionary, leaving little room for partisan manipulation of assignment.¹ Keith Krehbiel, a Stanford University professor of political science, agrees. He argues that, when a member's individual preferences were controlled, party influence had little impact on committee assignments.²

On the other hand, proponents of the party-selection theory argue that party leaders pick their favorites when deciding committee assignments. In *Parties and Leaders in the Post-Reform House*, American journalist David Rohde observes a strong resurgence of party cohesion and

partisanship in the House of the 1980s, arguing that party leaders have been exerting strong influence on committee assignments.³ Congressional expert Barbara Sinclair also concludes that party loyalty had become a significant consideration in committee assignment decisions by the late 1980s and early 1990s. Party leaders would compute party-support scores for members based on their own selection of key votes. In addition, those who gave nominating speeches for exclusive committees often mentioned whether or not a member adhered to the party's causes.⁴ As a consequence of party selection, John Manley, also a Stanford political science professor, notes that Democratic members of the prestigious Ways and Means Committee tend to support their party in voting more than the average House Democrats.⁵

Political scientist Kenneth Shepsle foreshadows the two points of view in his book, *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle: Democratic Committee Assignment in the Modern House*. Although Shepsle wrote this book earlier than most other works cited above, he seemed to foresee the argument and found merits from both of the opposing sides. Shepsle describes the assignment process as an *interest-advocacy-accommodation* process. This process starts with members articulating and advocating for their own interests. Ultimately, such interests are accommodated in a highly institutionalized fashion, in which party considerations come into play.⁶

Indeed, the demand for good committee assignment always exceeds supply. Two political science professors, Scott Frisch and Sean Kelly, computed each House committee's request success rate from the 86th Congress to the 101st Congress. The result shows that Banking & Finance, Energy & Commerce, and Rules committees all have a success rate below 30 percent, and the success rate of other prestigious committees, such as Ways & Means and Budget are just slightly above 30 percent.⁷ Therefore, even if Congresspeople are able to get on the committee that they want, certain prestigious committees are often too popular and hence remain out of

reach. As a result, decisions have to be based on other criteria. This paper seeks to explore if Representatives' loyalty to their parties is one of these criteria.

Past Empirical Studies

Many scholars have conducted statistical assessments to test whether party loyalty impacts committee assignment.⁸ In 1973, Rohde and Shepsle computed a “party support score” for each Democratic Congress member based on how closely he/she voted with the party on all roll call bills in the previous term.⁹ They labeled members as either “Supporters,” who voted more loyally to the party than the party average, or “Non-supporters,” who voted less loyally than the average. Rohde and Shepsle found that in the aggregate, 58 percent of “Supporters” secured a requested committee assignment, compared to only 37 percent of the “Non-supporters.” In another study, Stanford professor Gary Cox and Duke professor Matthew McCubbins performed a regression analyses to test the correlation between a House member’s transfer committee success rate and this member’s loyalty to the party.¹⁰ They defined party loyalty as the percentage of times that a member voted with his/her party leader and party whip, in opposition to the party leader and whip of the opposing party, among all roll call bills in the previous Congress.¹¹ Their regression analyses showed that for Republicans, a decline in a loyalty from the 95th to 50th percentile would yield a decline of 6.2 percent in the likelihood of transferring. For Democrats, the figure is as high as 11.2 percent. While these two studies form a solid basis for studying the relationship between party loyalty and committee assignment, there are four problems in their methodologies that this paper notes and aims to improve upon.

First, as Congress has become increasingly (some would say shockingly) polarized, most members now vote with the party on almost all bills. Using all roll call bills to calculate members’ loyalty scores—as Rohde and Shepsle did in their research—would most likely now

result in huge clusters of similar scores, making it difficult to distinguish loyal members from disloyal ones.

Second, Rohde and Shepsle used a binary system to differentiate members' level of loyalty. Members were characterized as either "Supporters" or "Non-supporters." Yet among "Supporters" there were both highly loyal members and moderately loyal members. Similarly, the "Non-supporters" group contained both highly rebellious members and moderately independent members. A binary categorization could not tell whether the difference between "Supporters" and "Non-supporters" was mainly caused by highly loyal/disloyal members or moderately loyal/disloyal members.

In fact, there has been intensive debate about whether members with extreme or moderate political leanings are rewarded more in the assignment process. Political scientists Nicole Asmussen and Adam Ramey described in detail the opposing points of view in their 2018 paper on party loyalty: Some believe that extremists are more favored in committee selection because extreme legislators are particularly prone to ideological grandstanding. Hence, party leaders cannot take extremists' votes for granted and have to reward their extreme members who nevertheless toe the party line. On the other hand, many believe that party leaders have more incentives to reward party moderates, since moderates usually represents the swing votes that are crucial for highly-contested bills.¹² Inspired by this contention, this paper will distinguish between highly loyal/disloyal members and moderately loyal/disloyal members instead of simply lumping members into the "Supporter" or "Non-supporter" group.

Third, Cox and McCubbins defined success of assignment as the ability to transfer between committees. Rohde and Shepsle defined success as being able to secure a requested assignment. Both definitions measure success from an individualized viewpoint. Yet some

members are inherently more conservative than others when it comes to which committees to request. These members will have a higher success rate since they rarely request committees that they know will not take them. Therefore, it is also important to define success by some less individualized and more universal metrics.

Lastly, both studies only analyzed if party loyalty affected committee assignment. Neither study explored whether members would become more loyal *after* obtaining desired committee assignments. This paper seeks to explore the reverse relationship as well.

Data & Research Design

To examine the relationships between party loyalty and committee assignment, this paper will test the following four null hypotheses, in which the word “members” refers to the members the United States House of Representatives.

Null hypothesis 1: Loyal members are as likely to obtain favorable committee assignments as disloyal members.

Null hypothesis 2: Highly loyal members are as likely to obtain favorable committee assignments as moderately loyal members.

Null hypothesis 3: Highly disloyal members are as likely to obtain favorable committee assignments as moderately disloyal members.

Null hypothesis 4: Members who have obtained favorable committee assignments are as likely to become more loyal as to become less loyal to their party.

While there is debate in academia about the rigor of null hypothesis testing, null hypothesis is still by far one of the most frequently used methods in political science studies. For example, take Cox and McCubbins’ examination of the impact of loyalty on committee transfer. They tested the null hypothesis that loyalty to the party leadership has no effect on the success of a

member's transfer requests.¹³ The clarity and simplicity of null hypothesis testing makes it a good fit to examine the questions posted in this paper as well. Nevertheless, rigorous testing of the null hypotheses requires a consistent approach to measure loyalty and define favorable committee assignments, which will be explained in the rest of the section.

To measure loyalty, this paper defines a members' loyalty score as the degree of similarity between a member's roll-call voting record and that of the party's majority. Roll-call voting record from the 101st Congress to the 115th Congress was obtained from the Github repository.¹⁴ To eliminate occasions when most members vote with their parties, this paper only selected roll-call votes where the winning side has a less-than-twenty-vote advantage over the losing side.¹⁵

Unlike the famous DW Nominat scoring mechanism, in which a member's ideology score is based on his/her entire voting record,¹⁶ this paper only takes into account a member's voting record in the nearest Congress, aiming to prioritize the member's current loyalty level. This paper also believes that comparison with party majority's voting record can better reflect a member's loyalty than comparison with that of party leader. This is because the House Steering Committees, where committee assignments are discussed and finalized, include members from all backgrounds. The party majority's voting record can approximate the preference of the entire steering committee.

To calculate the degree of similarity between a member's voting record and that of the party majority, this paper converted each member's voting record into a three-dimensional numeric vector. "Aye" is represented by number "1," "Nay" is represented by number "-1" and "Not Voting" is represented by number "0." Similarly, the party majority's voting record is also represented by a numeric vector of "1" "-1", and "0."

There has been debate about whether to include scenarios of “Not Voting.” On the one hand, the number of times a member does not vote, especially on critical matters, could greatly affect how loyal party leaders perceive him/her to be. On the other hand, the number of times a member does not vote can be beyond his/her control. For instance, some members were selected through special elections in the middle of the current Congressional term. The number of votes they missed should not be a factor in determining their loyalty. To solve this dilemma, this paper adopted three statistical methods to compute the similarity between members’ voting records and that of the party majority, with two methods taking into account “Not Voting” and one method disregarding “Not Voting.” The three statistical methods this paper used are the following:

1) *Cosine-based Similarity*: Under this method, the similarity is measured by computing the cosine angle between the two vectors of voting records. Let \vec{x} denote the vector representing the voting record of member A; let \vec{y} denote the vector representing the voting record of the party majority. Member A’s loyalty score is given by:

$$\text{Similarity} = \text{cosine}(\vec{x}, \vec{y}) = \frac{\vec{x} \cdot \vec{y}}{\|\vec{x}\|_2 \|\vec{y}\|_2}$$

Note: ‘ \cdot ’ refers to the dot product of the two vectors.

2) *Correlation-based Similarity*: For this method, the similarity is measured by computing the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two vectors of voting records. Let \vec{x} denote the vector representing the voting record of member A; let \vec{y} denote the vector representing the voting record of the party majority. Member A’s loyalty score is:

$$\text{Similarity} = \text{correlation}(\vec{x}, \vec{y}) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2} \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})^2}}$$

Note: 1. n is the number of selected bills for each Congress, i.e. vector length

2. \mathbf{x}_i is member A's vote on bill i ; \mathbf{y}_i is party majority's vote on bill i

$$3. \vec{\mathbf{x}} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{x}_i$$

3) *Cosine-based Similarity Adjusted to Not Voting*: As a complement to method (a), this method is aimed at negating the impact of "Not Voting" on loyalty score. Again, let $\vec{\mathbf{x}}$ denote the vector representing the voting record of member A; let $\vec{\mathbf{y}}$ denote the vector representing the voting record of the party majority. If the i^{th} item of $\vec{\mathbf{x}}$ is "0," both the i^{th} item of $\vec{\mathbf{x}}$ and $\vec{\mathbf{y}}$ will be deleted. The resulting two vectors $\vec{\mathbf{x}}$ and $\vec{\mathbf{y}}$ are still of the same length, and neither contain any "0" entry. Member A's loyalty score is computed by the same equation given in method 1).

After loyalty scores are produced, members are ranked from the highest score to the lowest score and fitted into five score ranges: the top 20 percent of members are considered highly loyal; the top 20 percent to the top 40 percent considered moderately loyal; the top 40 percent to the top 60 percent considered independent; the top 60 percent to the top 80 percent considered moderately disloyal; and members in the bottom 20 percent considered highly disloyal. This paper divides loyalty group by rank rather than value, because loyalty a relative. In a highly uniform Congress, most members would have a high loyalty score. In a split Congress, even a moderately high loyalty score would be deemed valuable by party leaders.

To test the first null hypothesis, this paper also classifies loyalty in a binary way. Highly loyal and moderately loyal members form the group of loyal members. Highly disloyal and moderately disloyal members compose the group of disloyal members. This binary classification derived from a five-fold classification is more precise, since removing the middle fold eliminates the interference from the most moderate members.

Having measured loyalty, this paper still needs to define “favorite committee assignment.” As suggested in the reviews of past studies, this paper seeks to measure favorite assignment in universal metrics that are independent of members’ self-evaluation. In fact, there is certain degree of consensus among scholars about which committees should be considered prestigious and universally desired. Frisch and Kelly named Appropriations, Budget, Rules and Ways & Means as prestigious committees in their study,¹⁷ which coincides with Cox and McCubbins’ definition of “control committees” in their book *Legislative Leviathan*.¹⁸

Accordingly, this paper defines favorable committee assignment in two ways. First, it can be selection into one of the four prestigious committees—Appropriation, Budget, Rules, and Ways and Means. Second, it can be election as the chair or ranking member of any committee. To match roll-call voting data, this paper acquired committee assignment data from the 101st to the 115th Congress from the website of MIT Professor Charles Steward.¹⁹ Having defined both loyalty and favorable assignment, this paper now sets out to test the four null hypotheses laid out in the beginning of this section on both parties and both metrics of favorable assignment. Since this paper believes that the visualization of trend is more informative to readers than simple numeration of statistics, the next section will focus mainly on presenting graphs rather than pure numbers.

Results

Null hypothesis 1: loyal member vs disloyal member

On the Republican side, when favorable assignment is defined as selection into prestigious committees, the p-values returned by three statistical methods all stand well below a significance level of 0.05, indicating that for Republicans newly selected into prestigious committees, the average percentage of loyal members is greater than that of disloyal members

(Figure 1.) Since this paper includes an equal number of loyal and disloyal members, the fact that more loyal members are in prestigious committees demonstrates that for Republicans, loyalty is likely a factor of prestigious committee selection.

The result for the Democratic Party is more complicated. Since none of the three methods report a p-value within the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis cannot be effectively rejected (Figure 1.) Yet it may also be wrong to conclude that loyalty has no effect on Democratic appointments, since the failure to reject the null hypothesis may be largely attributed to the surge of disloyal members elected to prestigious committees from the 113th to the 115th Congresses. When looking at the rest of the Congresses, the advantage to the loyal over the disloyal is self-evident. Without further investigation, it is unclear whether the surge of disloyal members in the 113th to 115th Congress is just an ephemeral blip or a start of a long-lasting new trend.

When the definition of favorable assignment changes from “prestigious committee” to “election of chair and ranking member,” the difference between Democrats and Republicans are more noticeable. On the Republican side, two of the three statistical methods indicate a p-value below the significance level of 0.05, inferring that, on average, the advantage of loyal members over disloyal members is statistically significant (Figure 2.) Yet on the Democratic side, all three methods produced a p-value greater than the significance level of 0.05, meaning that among newly-elected Democratic chairs and ranking members, the average percentage of loyal members are not statistically higher than the average percentage of disloyal members (Figure 2.)

Overall, the test of null hypothesis 1 showed consistent result in favor of loyalty on the Republicans side, whereas the results for Democrats are more subtle and unclear.

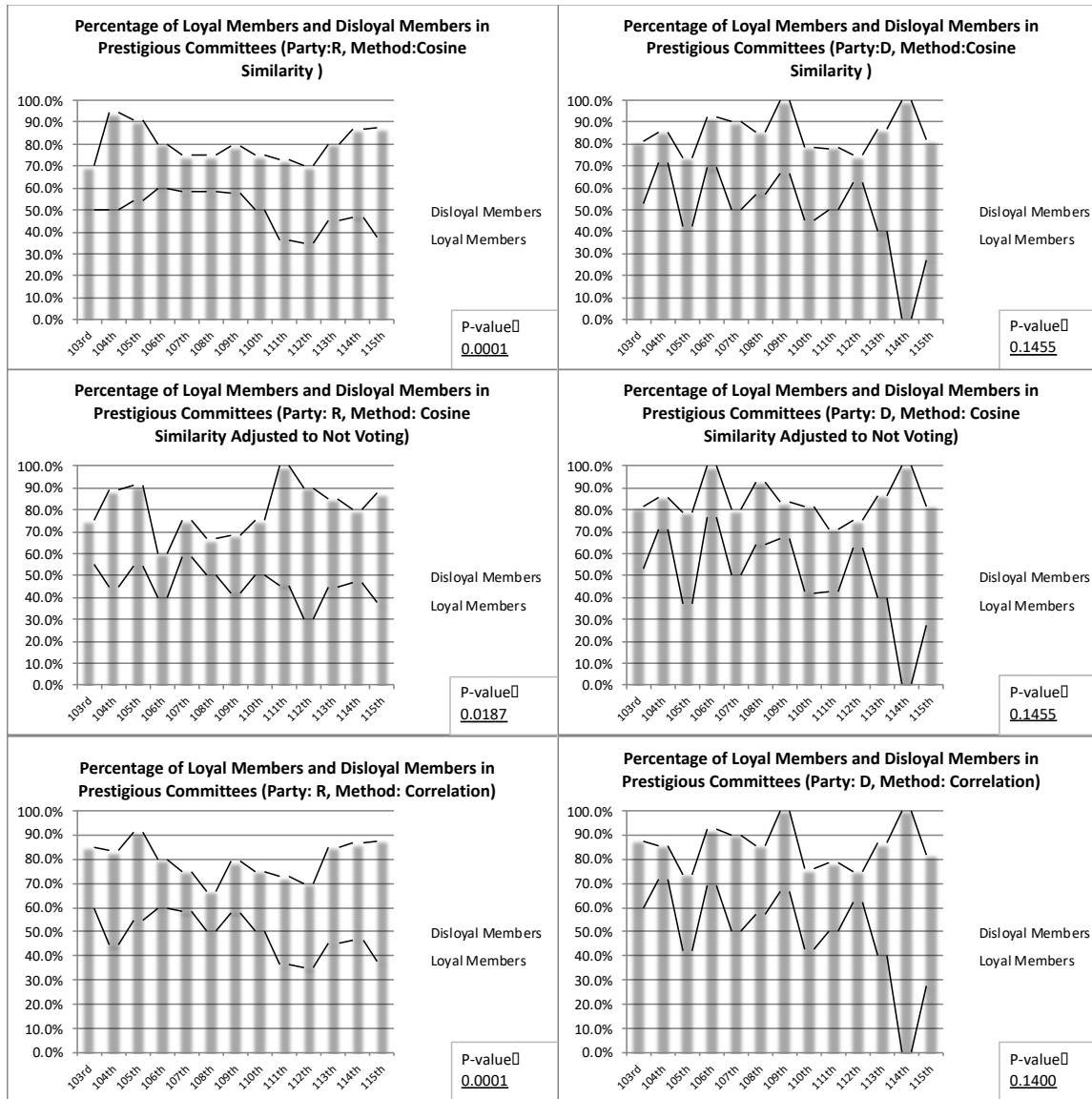


Figure 1

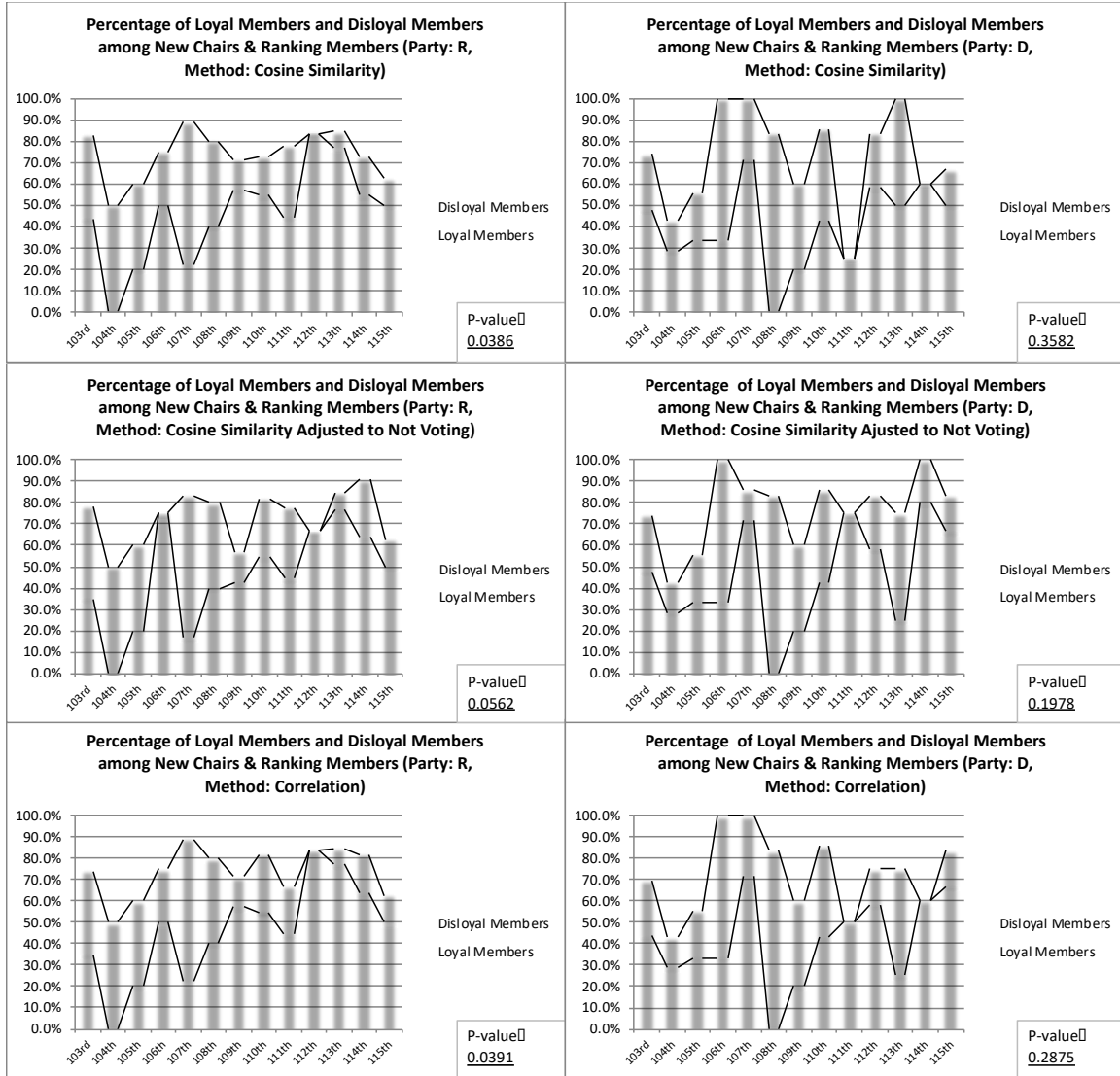


Figure 2

Null hypothesis 2 & 3: highly loyal/disloyal member vs moderately loyal/disloyal member

For Republicans, when favorable assignment is defined as selection into prestigious committees, this paper found no statistical evidence that moderately loyal members perform worse than highly loyal members, as the tests of the null hypothesis 2 returned by three methods consistently yield p-values well above the 0.05 significance level (Figure 3.) In fact, moderately loyal Republicans often perform better than highly loyal Republicans. For instance, when

measured by the *Cosine Similarity* method, more moderately loyal members were elected to prestigious committees than highly loyal members in seven out of thirteen Congresses. In merely five out of thirteen Congresses, more highly loyal members were elected than moderately loyal members. The other two methods produced similar results.

This paper also did not find compelling evidence that highly disloyal members are less likely to be elected to prestigious committees than moderately disloyal members on the Republican side. Although the method *Cosine Similarity Adjusted to Not Voting* returned a p-value slightly below the 0.05 significance level, neither of the other two methods corroborate with this finding. The advantage of moderately disloyal members over highly disloyal members does not stand out distinctly.

The same tests for Democrats yield similar results. There is no statistical evidence that highly loyal members are more likely to get onto prestigious committees than moderately loyal members. Nor is there evidence that highly disloyal members are less likely to make their way onto prestigious committees (Figure 3.)

Figure 3 also sheds light on the trend of prestigious committee selection in the past thirteen Congresses. In the most recent three to five Congresses, an increasing number of less loyal members have been selected. For both parties after the 110th Congress, the percentage of members considered disloyal (by this paper's definition) is almost equal to the percentage of loyal members. This observation directly contradicts the common belief that the House is becoming ever more polarized.

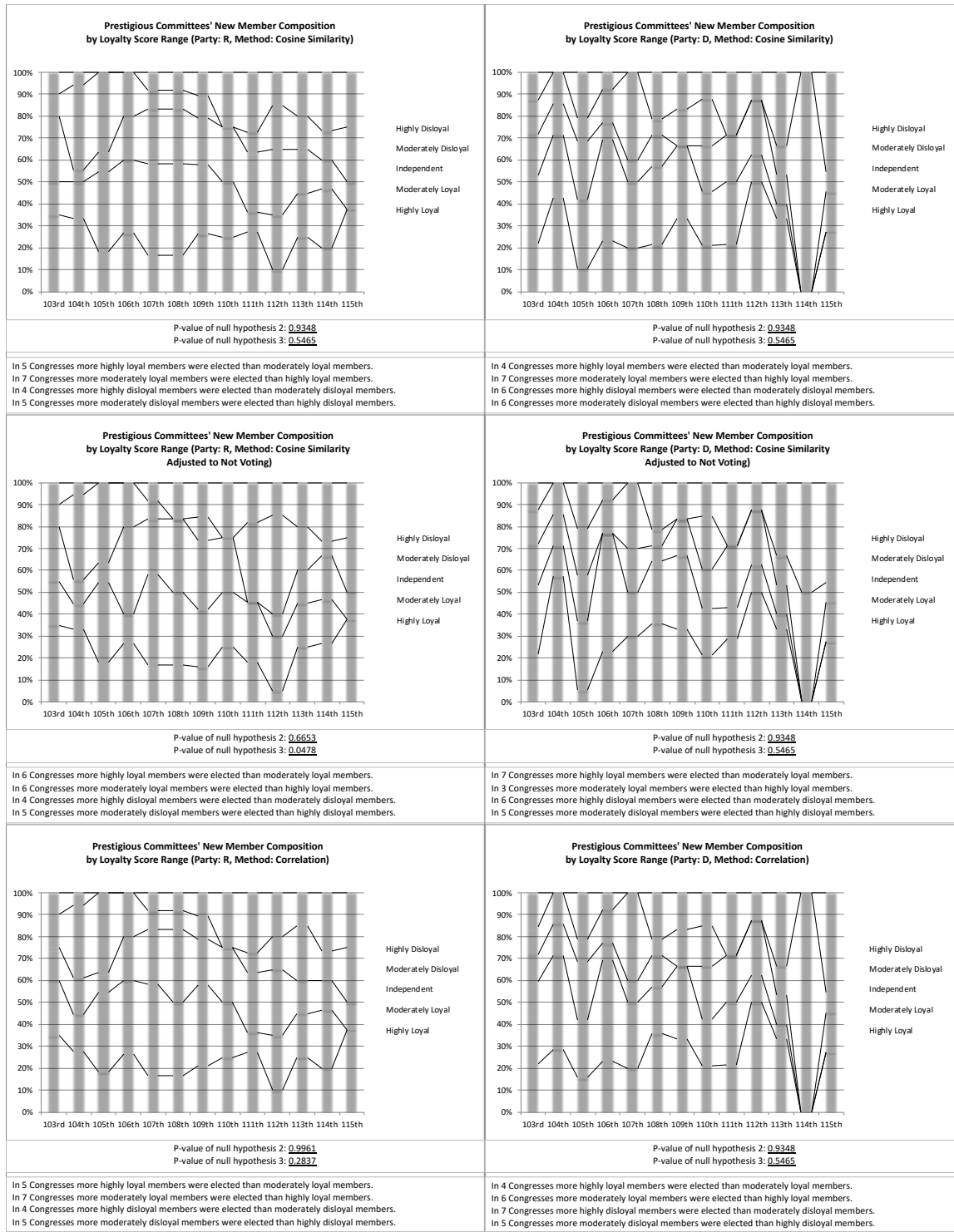


Figure 3

When the definition of favorable assignment changes from “prestigious committee” to “election of chair and ranking member,” the effect of loyalty does not play out in a linear way either. The percentage difference between moderately loyal members and highly loyal members is not statistically significant, nor the percentage difference between moderately disloyal members and highly disloyal members (Figure 4.) Moreover, there is tentative evidence that moderately loyal members might actually performed better than highly loyal members. For instance, on the Republican sides, the *Cosine Similarity* methods indicates that on average 24.47 percent of new chairs and ranking members are moderately loyal members whereas only 21.43 percent are highly loyal members. Furthermore, while in seven out of thirteen Congresses more moderately loyal members were elected chairs or ranking members than highly loyal members, the opposite was true in only five out of thirteen Congresses. Democrats exhibit similar patterns, as can be seen from Figure 8. The favorability of moderate members in chair and ranking member selection is not unexpected, as chairs and ranking members have to possess the ability to mediate communications among members with various ideological leanings.

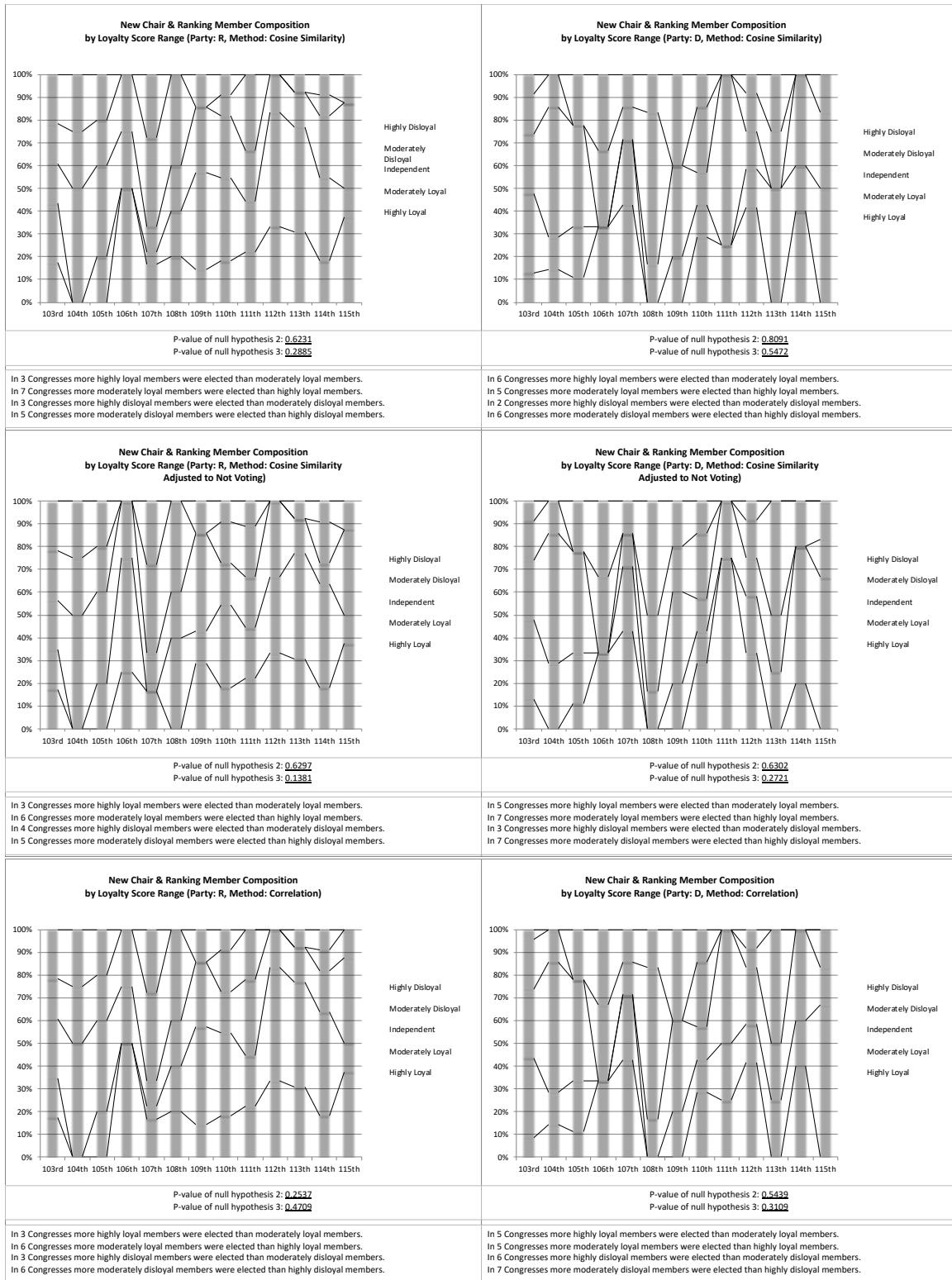


Figure 4

Null Hypothesis 4: Loyalty increases or decreases after receiving favorable assignments

For both parties, the loyalty levels of most members remain the same before and after their receiving favorable committee assignments. On average, the percentage of members whose loyalty has increased is not different from the percentage of members whose loyalty has decreased. Null hypothesis 4 cannot be effectively disproved for either party, since 5 out of 6 p-values stand over the 0.05 significance range (Figure 5.) Therefore, for both Republicans and Democrats, there is no evidence that selection into prestigious committees will make members vote more closely with their parties.

When the definition of favorable assignment changes to “chairs and ranking members,” tests on Republican showed statistically significant. All three methods produce a p-value within the 0.05 significance level (Figure 6,) rejecting the null hypothesis in favor of the new conclusion that Republicans on average become more loyal to their party after being elected chairs or ranking members.

However, it should also be noted that the above conclusion is mostly produced by the period from the 103rd to the 119th Congress. As shown in Figure 11, after the 110th Congress, many Republican chairs actually became *less* loyal to their party after their appointments, meaning that, though statistically significant, the increase of Republican chairs’ loyalty does not hold for every Congress. This subtle observation attests to the necessity to combine statistical analysis with graphics when interpreting results.

Meanwhile, tests on Democrats still yield no statistically significant results when favorable assignments are defined as being elected to chairs and ranking members. This adds to the overall observation that loyalty affects Republicans more than Democrats.

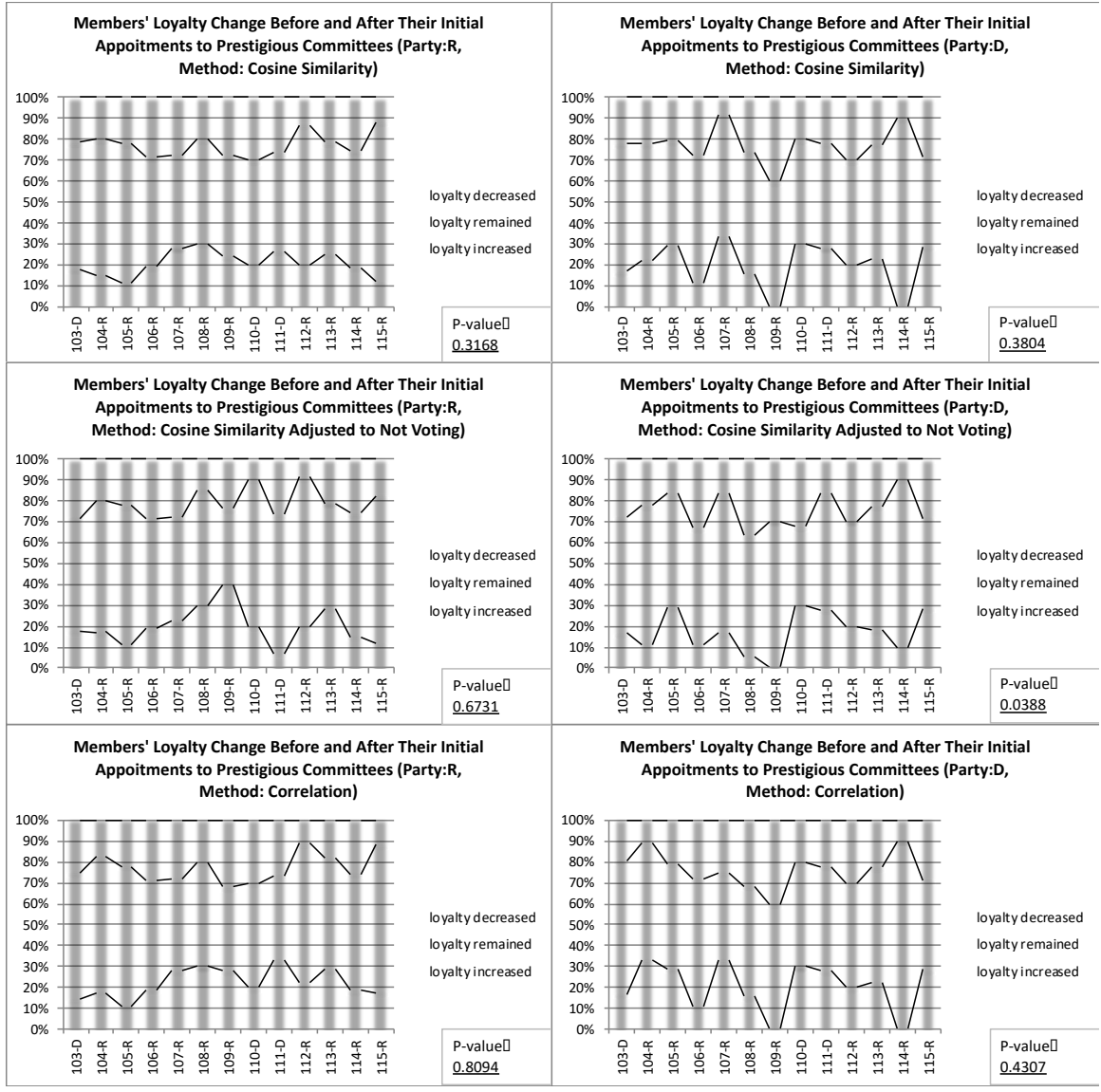


Figure 5

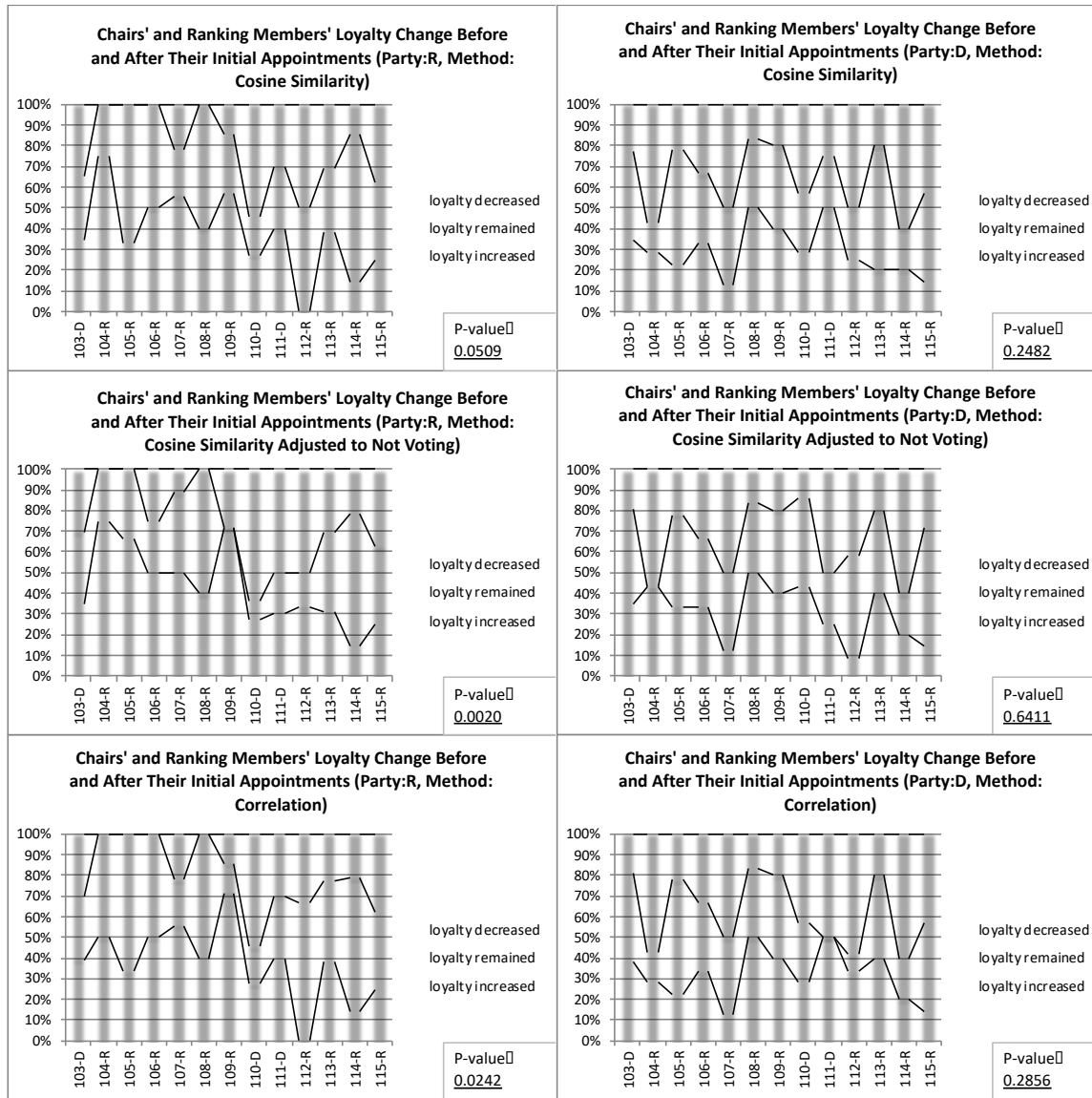


Figure 6

Interpretations

This study reveals two consistent trends from the 103rd to 115th Congress. First, moderately loyal members are as likely, if not more likely, to receive favorable committee assignments as highly loyal members. Second, the correlation between loyalty and favorable

assignment is stronger for Republicans than for Democrats. While either trend must be the product of multiple factors, this paper proposes one possible explanation for each trend.

In terms of moderately loyal vs highly loyal, many highly loyal members are elected from safe districts (districts where their party holds a strong electoral advantage over its opponent.) The interests of their constituents naturally overlap with those of their party. Meanwhile, party leaders tend to allocate powerful assignments to members in swing districts to boost their reelection chance. Thus, highly loyal members might not be rewarded as much as their loyalty scores suggest.

To examine this idea that party leaders favor members from swing districts in committee assignment, this paper examined the twenty-three Republican House members whose constituencies voted for Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump in the 2016 election, since these members can be seen as coming from swing districts. As of November 2017, five of the twenty-three members are serving on the Committee on Ways and Means, with Peter Roskam (R-IL) chairing the Tax Policy subcommittee, Dave Reichert (R-WA) chairing the Trade subcommittee, and Carlos Curbelo (R-FL) elected as one of the only two sophomore representatives. Three of the twenty-three are serving on the Committee on Appropriation, with John Culberson (R-TX) and Kevin Yoder (R-KS) chairing two subcommittees within Appropriation. Furthermore, four of the twenty-three are/were chairs of a House Standing Committee: Darrell Issa (R-CA) chaired the Committee on Oversight and Government Reforms; Pete Session (R-TX) is chairing the Committee on Rules; Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) chaired the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Ed Royce is chairing the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Clearly, these twenty-three members are disproportionately appointed to important positions in strategic committees, which supports the claim that members from swing district are more likely to obtain powerful assignments.

Daniel Lee of Duke University resonates with the above reasoning. As Lee points out, “Party leadership expects that a member who is in a district with interests congruent with those of the party and is electorally safe should be able to show high levels of party loyalty easily. Conversely, the leadership has lower expectations for a member who is in a district with incongruent interest and electorally unsafe, since this member is taking a bigger risk in showing party loyalty.”²⁰ Lee’s analysis also points to an important limitation shared by many studies of party loyalty, including this one: The measurement of loyalty needs to account for the political leaning of each member’s constituency. Their constituencies’ political leanings should then constitute the baseline of members’ loyalty scores and each member may have a different baseline score. A recent study conducted by Nicole Asmussen and Adam Ramey attempts to measure such baseline loyalty by resorting to lopsided roll call votes. They assume that party pressure would only be exerted selectively on tightly contested bills. Hence lopsided roll calls would measure members’ “party-free” ideal points.²¹ However, one may also argue that the opposite is true: members are more likely to cast symbolic votes rather than votes that truly reflect their ideologies when they know their votes would be matter. Therefore, one should evaluate a member’s loyalty by studying the political leaning of his or her constituents, rather than simply using select rollcall votes.

Regarding the second trend—that Republicans seem to emphasize loyalty more than Democrats, this paper attributes it partly to Republican’s majority party status and their small seat advantage. First, within the thirteen Congresses include in this research, Republicans controlled ten of them. Multiple studies have shown that majority parties tend to emphasize loyalty more than minority parties. For instance, the study conducted by Asmussen and Ramey in 2018 reveal that party loyalty mattered significantly less when the party was the minority. They

stated that the majority party has a more urgent need to have a record of legislative accomplishments, so they were more likely to resort to committee assignment to strengthen party discipline.²² Furthermore, Republicans held only a slight majority in terms of seats, which further pushed them to emphasize loyalty. As demonstrated in Table 1,²³ when Democrats were the majority party of the House, they usually possessed a greater seat advantage over Republicans. Yet when Republicans were the majority of the House, they often controlled the House only with a small seat advantage. A slight majority made loyalty an extremely important concept to Republicans, urging Republican leadership to place loyal members on critical committee appointments. From the 112th to the 115th Congress, Republicans started to expand their lead and enlarge their majority-party advantage over Democrats. It is also during this period that we see the effect of loyalty growing smaller on Republican committee assignments. In that sense, loyalty plays a more significant role in tightly contested Congresses, especially for the majority party.

Party Division by Congress			
Congress	Number of Democratic Seats	Number of Republican Seats	Majority Party
103rd	258	176	D
104th	204	230	R
105th	207	226	R
106th	211	223	R
107th	212	221	R
108th	205	229	R
109th	202	231	R
110th	236	199	D
111th	257	178	D
112th	193	242	R
113th	201	234	R
114th	188	247	R
115th	194	241	R

Table 1

Limitations

Notwithstanding its inventive research design, this study has limitations. For instance, three of the four hypotheses tested in the paper do not take into account inertia in the assignment process. Inertia refers to the fact that once members have a berth on a committee, they tend to remain in subsequent congresses unless they request to transfer. Separating first-time committee members and senior members can help control the impact of inertia however this paper intentionally included committee members of all terms in the testing of the first three hypotheses, due to concerns of limited sample sizes.

Conventionally, prestigious committees add few new members from the minority party. Take the Rules Committee for example. As Republicans controlled all of the most recent four Congresses (112th to 115th), only two new Democratic members were selected to the Rules Committee during this period.²⁴ The Ways and Means Committee also had few new Democratic members in the same period. In fact, it is not uncommon for a prestigious committee to not include any new member from the minority party in the initial assignment process. Therefore, controlling for inertia by separating first-time committee members is bound to result in extremely small sample sizes, which would yield inaccurate results in testing.

Nevertheless, this paper partially accounted for inertia by adding the fourth null hypothesis, i.e. whether members become more and less loyalty to their parties after being rewarded in the assignment process. As the testing result showed little evidence of members become less loyal after getting onto prestigious committees, it is reasonable to assume that members' loyalty do not significantly change even if they know they are likely to remain on prestigious committees in subsequent terms. Hence, the impact of inertia will not fundamentally upend the findings in this paper.

In addition to inertia, certain topics that are important to the evaluation of committee assignment are also not within the scope of this paper. These topics include transfer requests, committee size manipulation, internal politics within the Steering Committee, and party leaders. As Shepsle demonstrates in his seminal book *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle*, a compelling investigation into the committee assignment process needs to account for a myriad of factors, synthesize evidence from multiple datasets, and connect quantitative evidence with a qualitative understanding of the inner workings of Congress.

Conclusion

This paper examines the relationship between House members' loyalty to their party and the outcome of their committee assignments. Through testing four null hypotheses, this paper not only investigated into loyalty's correlation with favorability in assignment, but also explored the subtle difference between consistent loyalty and moderate loyalty, and how loyalty changes after members receiving good assignments.

First, this paper found that loyal Republicans are statistically more likely to be elected to prestigious committees or to become chairs and ranking members than disloyal Republicans. For Democrats, the advantage of loyal members is not statistically significant. This result does not come as a surprise, since the Republican Party is generally considered as more centralized in nature than the Democratic Party.

Next, this paper found that a member's chance of obtaining favorable assignment does not always increase with his/her loyalty to the party. Interestingly, this finding is especially true for Republicans. Among all Congresses covered in this study, the number of Congresses with more moderately loyal than highly loyal Republicans surpasses the number of Congresses with

more highly loyal than moderately loyal Republicans. This observation points to the limitation of using loyalty to explain who obtains what committee assignments.

Last but not least, this paper tested the null hypothesis that members who obtained a favorable committee assignment are as likely to become more loyal as to become less loyal to his/her party. While this hypothesis is in general not disproved, from the 103rd to 109th Congress, a plurality of newly-appointed Republican chairs did become more loyal to their party after their appointments. These chairs may have become more loyal after the resurgence of party discipline under former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich. However, it remains unknown if this trend will continue in the future.

The House committee assignment process is obviously affected by a host of factors. Some of them are detailed in this paper while others are not. This study aimed to offer readers a general sense of how loyalty affects committee assignment and provide insight for scholars of political science that might be useful in their future studies.

ENDNOTES

¹ Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1993), 35.

² Keith Krehbiel, "Where's the Party?" *British Journal of Political Science*, vol 23, no. 2 (April 1993), 235-266, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400009741>.

³ David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 13-16.

⁴ Barbara Sinclair, *Legislators, Leaders and Lawmaking: The U.S. House of Representatives in the Post Reform Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 94

⁵ John F. Manley, *The Politics of Finance: The House Committee on Ways and Means* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 24-25.

⁶ Kenneth A. Shepsle, *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle, Democratic Committee Assignments in the Modern House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

⁷ Scott A. Frisch and Sean Q. Kelly, "Self-Selection Reconsidered: House Committee Assignment Requests and Constituency Characteristics," *Political Research Quarterly* vol. 57, no. 2 (June 2004): 325-336, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3219875>.

⁸ Edward B. Hasecke and Jason D. Mycoff, "Party Loyalty and Legislative Success," *Political Research Quarterly* vol. 60, no. 4 (December 2007): 607-17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907305754>.

⁹ David W. Rohde and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 1973. "Democratic Committee Assignments in the House of Representatives: Strategic Aspects of a Social Choice Process," *American Political Science Review* vol. 67, no. 3 (September 1973): 889–905, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958631>.

¹⁰ Cox and McCubbins, 209-231.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹² Nicole Asmussen and Adam Ramey. "When Loyalty Is Tested: Do Party Leaders Use Committee Assignments as Rewards?" *Congress & the Presidency* vol 45, no. 1 (January 2018): 41-65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07343469.2017.1418764>

¹³ Cox and McCubbins, 210.

¹⁴ "UnitedStates/Congress," Sunlight Foundation and GovTrack.us, accessed October 2017, <https://github.com/unitedstates/congress>.

¹⁵ This study is cutoff at twenty votes for two reasons. First, from the 103rd Congress to the 115th Congress, the majority party on average had a thirty-eight-seat advantage over the minority party. A less-than-twenty-vote situation means that the majority party had lost more than half of their seating advantage. Second, during the same period, the majority party on average held 218 seats. A less-than-twenty-vote situation means that the outcome of the bill can be swung by less than 5 percent of the members in the majority party, which is a sign of close contest.

¹⁶ "DW-NOMINATE Scores with Bootstrapped Standard Errors," Carroll, Royce et al., accessed September 15, 2017, <https://legacy.voteview.com/dwnomin.htm>.

¹⁷ Frisch and Kelly, 325-336.

¹⁸ Cox and McCubbins, 210-212.

¹⁹ "Charles Stewart's Congressional Data Page," Charles Stewart, accessed October 2017, http://web.mit.edu/17.251/www/data_page.html.

²⁰ Daniel J. Lee, "Going Once, Going Twice, Sold! The Committee Assignment Process as an All-Pay Auction," *Public Choice* vol. 135, no. 3-4 (December 2007): 237–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-007-9256-8>.

²¹ Asmussen and Ramey, 45-46

²² *Ibid.*, 59

²³ "103rd United States Congress.," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed November 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/103rd_United_States_Congress; "104th United States Congress.," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed November 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/104th_United_States_Congress; "105th United States Congress.," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed November 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/105th_United_States_Congress; "106th United States Congress.," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed November 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/106th_United_States_Congress; "107th United States Congress.," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed November 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/107th_United_States_Congress; "108th United States Congress.," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed November 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/108th_United_States_Congress; "109th United States Congress.," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed November 2017. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/109th_United_States_Congress; "110th United States Congress.,"

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²⁴ The calculation only includes initial selection. For example, in the 155th Congress, Congressman Norma Torres replaced Congressman Louise Slaughter in the Rules Committee midway through the term. This replacement is not included in the calculation.